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THE
HEIR OF THE AGES

THE
HEIR OF THE AGES

BY
JAMES PAYN
AUTHOR OF 'BY PROXY' ETC.

A NEW EDITION

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1887

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LOAN STACK

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NOTE

THE two poems, entitled 'The Children' and 'On an Old Harpsichord,' ascribed to Matthew Meyrick in this novel, were written by a lad who died many years ago of consumption, before he attained his majority. I never knew him personally—our relation being only that of editor and contributor—but judging from his letters, no less than from his verses, I am well convinced that in him his country lost a genius. The poems in question were written, I believe, in his nineteenth year.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE DOCTOR'S FIAT	1
II. JEFFERSON	8
III. THE INTERVIEW	15
IV. AT DINNER	20
V. SORCERY	27
VI. JEFFERSON ASKS A FAVOUR	32
VII. THE START	38
VIII. COURSING	43
IX. CONFIDENCE	50
X. 'THE BOY'	56
XI. COMPROMISED	64
XII. THE JOURNEY	73
XIII. AT THE LOOK-OUT	81
XIV. ROGER LEYDEN	89
XV. ON BATTLE HILL	97
XVI. CRITICISM	103
XVII. LITERATURE	109
XVIII. THE HOROSCOPE	117
XIX. AN EDITOR	123
XX. GOOD NEWS	130
XXI. AN UNWELCOME VISITOR	137
XXII. ON THE PIER	142
XXIII. THE CONFEDERATES	150
XXIV. TITANIA	158
XXV. SENT FOR	164

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXVI. OUTSIDE THE WINDOW	170
XXVII. A TURN OF THE TIDE	178
XXVIII. CONGRATULATIONS	188
XXIX. A NEW DEPARTURE	195
XXX. IN THE MARYLEBONE ROAD	202
XXXI. A VISITOR	210
XXXII. IN HAREWOOD SQUARE	218
XXXIII. EDITOR AND CONTRIBUTOR	225
XXXIV. 'THE PUBLIC GOOD'	233
XXXV. A HALF CONFIDENCE	243
XXXVI. 'OPINIONS IN STORIES'	250
XXXVII. A CHANCE MEETING	255
XXXVIII. AFTER-DINNER CRITICS	261
XXXIX. REVISITED	268
XL. THE SECRET	276
XLI. A DEAL	282
XLII. CONGRATULATED	290
XLIII. THE SHADOW IN THE SUNSHINE	294
XLIV. MR. LEYDEN'S REPRESENTATIVE	300
XLV. 'I HAVE DONE YOU WRONG'	306
XLVI. RAISING THE WIND	313
XLVII. AN EXPLANATION	320
XLVIII. TELLING THE NEWS	327
XLIX. AT THE DUCHESS'S	333
L. STRUCK DOWN	340
LI. DISAPPOINTED HOPE	347
LII. THE HEIR OF THE AGES	352

THE HEIR OF THE AGES

CHAPTER I.

THE DOCTOR'S FIAT.

IF there is one attitude above all others that, in an Englishman at least, betokens personal complacency, and the sense of being monarch of all he surveys, it is the standing on his own hearthrug with his legs slightly apart, his back to the fire, and his coat-tails under his arms. Neither sculptor nor painter, so far as I know, has transferred this particular pose to marble or canvas—perhaps from the impossibility of including within it the whole human form divine—but there is nothing equal to it in the way of characteristic significance. The head is thrown carelessly back, the shoulder-blades rest lightly on the edge of the mantelpiece, and the expression of the face is that of supreme content and undisputed authority.

Under these favourable circumstances, Mr. Christopher Melburn, of Burrow Hall, Justice of the Peace for Downshire, is introduced to the reader's notice. He is a tall, handsome, and strikingly aristocratic-looking man of sixty years old or so, but bearing that 'bouquet' of years as lightly as though it were a single flower. His fine grey eyes have not lost their fire, nor do they stand in need of glasses to read the smallest type in which his magisterial doings are chronicled in the local paper; if his brow is slightly furrowed, it is not by time so much as by a certain chronic disapproval of the turn things are taking in the world—'opening of flood-gates, tampering with vested interests and the sacred ark of the Constitution,'

&c. &c., for he is a Whig of the old school : neither in his frame nor face is there the slightest sign of decadence or of giving way to anything or anybody. When he speaks of one of the many misfortunes which are about to befall his country, he always adds, 'I shall not live to see it,' but not with that patriotic and unselfish air with which the observation is generally made ; his tone would rather lead you to understand that while Christopher Melburn is alive his country is safe, but that when he shall be gathered to his fathers (an event, however, not to occur just now by any means) the last barrier to sweeping change will have been swept away, and after that the Deluge.

In some persons the thoughts of so terrible a catastrophe taking place for certain after their demise would have affected their spirits, but this gentleman's nature was cast in too heroic a mould to be disturbed by considerations of that kind. If it had been possible for an idea of Mr. Melburn's to have taken so vague a shape, I think that some such formula as 'serve them right' would have expressed his views upon the generation that would succeed him. If he had been elected for the county when he stood for it—instead of his having thrown away twenty thousand pounds he could ill afford in the dirt, and *on* the dirt, in that vain endeavour—he would have made a figure in Parliament, have attained a place in the Cabinet, and possibly changed the aspect of the whole political horizon from dark to light ; but since the talents which Heaven had given him had been ignored, and his patriotic aspirations unappreciated, then Downshire and the world must take the consequences. They had rejected an opportunity which certainly was not likely, looking at the state of his finances, to occur again. He was a power still, and no small one ; but that more extended sphere of usefulness to which he had looked forward (in company with a baronetcy if not a peerage) had been denied him by his fellow-countrymen, and so much the worse for them.

In his own opinion, however, which nothing could shake, Christopher Melburn was as great a man as ever ; and in his own house, and on his own hearthrug, could still regard matters with much complacency. The appearance of things about him was indeed of a nature to inspire this feeling. The apartment in which he stood, his private sanctum—'study' he called it, though its array of books was limited—was a handsome one ; and the view from the great bay window—for the other

and smaller one only looked out upon the carriage sweep—was very extensive.

In the foreground was a garden, bright and fresh with the tints of early spring ; the lawn sloped down to a lake beautiful in itself, and possessing the additional merit of being the only piece of ornamental water on the vast table-land of down on which Burrow Hall was situated ; upon the other side of it lay the park, which, though of somewhat small extent for so pretentious a title, was charmingly dotted with knolls and crags ; then a broad band of trees, which sheltered this favoured residence from bitter north and roaring east ; and, beyond them, the rounded masses of the South Downs stretching to left and right, like some green sea on the day after a storm.

Neither the picturesqueness of the landscape nor its extent formed, however, its chief attraction to the person who was at present regarding it with so much approval, but the knowledge that so far as the eye could reach it was all his own. A good many senses have been added to the original five in these later years ; but there is one which must always have existed in some form as universally as to-day—the influence of which is, I am told, with some men so great as to make up for the absence of any other—namely, the sense of Possession. A few, indeed, have no personal experience of it. When they see a jewel, the glow or the sparkle of it gladdens their eye (perhaps for half a minute), but the consciousness of its being their own, though they would like to have it to sell well enough, would not enhance its charms for them in the slightest degree ; a rare volume, the ownership of which fills the book-hunter with the most pleasurable emotions, may be theirs or the first pickpocket's, for all they care, when once they have become acquainted with its contents ; while, as for that eagerness for ' laying field to field ' of which the Hebrew prophet speaks with such reprobation, it is to them an inexplicable egotism, which would carry with it, if successful, a terrible punishment indeed, since ' to be placed alone in the midst of the earth ' is about the last object of their ambition. The majority of mankind, however, it is probable, think with Mr. Melburn, who, if he could have worn the stars for shirt-studs, and attached the moon to his watch-chain, would have set a much higher value on the heavenly bodies than he did at present. There was one blot upon the landscape, indeed, which no other eye perceived but his own—namely, a very

heavy mortgage, begun in those electioneering times, and afterwards enlarged on certain pressing occasions; but just now it did not intrude upon him. He was not only at ease with himself, as indeed it was his wont to be, but with the world at large, including the Jews.

At this moment a step was heard coming down the stairs from the floor above—a very heavy step, which nevertheless moved with as little sound as the weight of him to whom it belonged admitted of; a slow and thoughtful step which somehow conveyed the impression to the hearer of a made-up mind.

‘Thank goodness, Edith is all right,’ observed Mr. Christopher Melburn to himself. ‘When Dalling comes down like that without stopping at the landing the case is clear—there are no complications.’

He had had opportunities of hearing Dr. Dalling’s step when it had lingered; not once nor twice only, had it been the doctor’s task to tell the squire bad news concerning his own flesh and blood. Two daughters and a son had died under his roof of the fell disease, consumption. His son, Jefferson, the sole offspring of his first marriage, was, indeed, strong and healthy enough; but Mary, his remaining child by the second marriage, was delicate; and her mother had been an invalid for years. Some new phase in her condition had necessitated the doctor’s visit on this occasion. To her daughter it had seemed alarming; but Mr. Melburn thought, or pretended to think, otherwise. He always discredited everything personally disagreeable to himself as an imputation against Providence, and on this occasion had sent for the doctor less from apprehension than to have his own view corroborated by a medical opinion.

The door opened, and in stalked a man of such gigantic stature that if he had died, as some men are said to do, by inches, he might have composed an encyclopædia, supplement and all, during his last illness. All that is often to be said of such exceptional individuals is that they are very tall men; but this Anak was remarkable for something besides his thews and sinews. There is a well-known saying in these days that ‘there are only two doctors out of London,’ a statement which varies with the speaker, and becomes enlarged, let us hope, with his experience; but if, as doubtless was the case, it was made in the times of which we write, the name of Dr. Dalling would certainly have been found in the most exclusive list. So

great was his fame that he was sometimes even summoned to the metropolis to take part in consultations. In Downshire he was called 'The Infallible,' and by his intimates 'The Pope.' Though confident of speech, his manners and movements were exceptionally gentle; it almost seemed, as with Gulliver among the Lilliputians, that in associating with his fellow-men he was afraid of his own strength and weight; and indeed there was some reason for his being careful. Some years ago, striding home one evening along the downs—for whenever he could, he used his own legs instead of his horse's—he was set upon by two tramps or footpads. It was during a thick fog, or they would probably never have committed such an act of imprudence. Probably they only saw a part of him, and very naturally mistook it for the whole. When the doctor loomed upon them in his entirety they would very gladly have dropped their bludgeons and fled; but matters were too far advanced for remedy: his gigantic arms flew out like the suckers of an octopus, and seized each man by the scruff of his neck; then he knocked their heads together—just once. In the one case, as he intended, there was a simple fracture, but in the other—perhaps the poor wretch had a softer cranium—the blow was fatal. It was said that Dr. Dalling ever afterwards shrank from attending cases of concussion of the brain, which, in a hunting country, must have been inconvenient.

His huge countenance, bronzed by wind and weather, looked very grave and gentle as he now entered the room. But even if that had not been its normal expression, Mr. Christopher Melburn would have declined to draw from it any evil augury.

'Well, doctor, and what's your news?' he inquired, without shifting his comfortable position. 'This east wind has been playing its usual tricks, I suppose, with my unfortunate wife.'

'It has not improved matters, no doubt,' was the dry reply; 'but the weather is but a small factor in a case like hers. I am sorry to say that I think badly of her.'

'So you have said any time during these last ten years,' returned the squire, with an attempt at cheerfulness. 'We can hardly expect to see poor Edith very strong again, of course; but, as she says herself, "creaking doors hang long." You don't mean, surely, to assert of your positive knowledge that there is any danger?'

From underneath the doctor's shaggy eyebrows, which would have made a tolerable head of hair for most sexagenarians, there flashed forth a terrible look of contempt and reproof.

'There is more than danger, Mr. Melburn,' he put in, curtly. 'Your wife's malady has, in my opinion, taken a direction that can only have one end.'

The squire turned pale, and, gathering himself together, walked straight up to his companion, who was standing by the window.

'Good heavens, Dalling! Do you mean that my wife is dying?' His tone had genuine feeling in it: he was shocked.

'There is no *immediate* danger, if you mean that, Mr. Melburn.'

The other uttered a sigh of relief.

'She may rise from her bed to-morrow—in all probability will do so, for she has the pluck of two women—and may even come down stairs as usual; but her recovery is utterly hopeless. The only thing that can prolong her life is change of air, of scene, of all the conditions of life to which she is accustomed. As soon as she is strong enough to bear the journey, you must take her to the German baths, which formerly benefited her so much. It is advice, Mr. Melburn,' he continued, observing the other was about to speak, 'which I should not think of offering—since I know from her own lips the inconvenience it will entail upon you—if there were any choice in the matter; but, in my judgment, there is none.'

'Really, Dalling,' said the squire, walking about the room with rapid strides, 'your advice is more like a *congé d'élire* than a medical prescription. One would think that there was some penalty like that of *præmunire* for any one who should be so audacious as to neglect it.'

'I don't know as to penalty,' observed the doctor, drily; 'but the simple effect of such neglect will be that "the creaking door" of which you spoke will not hang upon its fragile hinge three months. It is for you to decide whether it is worth while to prolong life under circumstances which may seem to you undesirable. In our profession we have only one view of such matters; but very possibly it may be an erroneous one.'

'It is very inconvenient,' murmured Mr. Melburn, testily, but without taking the least notice of his companion's satire,

'just as the spring is coming on, and matters on the estate want particular attention. We're expecting the new governess, too, this very day; and Jefferson is coming home on purpose to meet Winthrop.'

'The world is full of inconveniences,' returned the doctor, cheerfully; 'and one can no more escape from them than I can keep myself dry in a shower by picking my way through the drops of rain.' He could afford to joke, for he knew that he had carried his point; when the squire began to count his slain—to enumerate his grievances—it was a sign that the battle was over.

The matter being settled, the doctor had the tact, seldom wanting to gentlemen of his calling, to make no further reference to it. The critical state of Mrs. Melburn's health was not indeed, one would have thought, a subject to be dismissed so curtly; but he knew his man, and that he required quite as 'peculiar treatment' as his patient.

'And who is the young lady,' he inquired, 'whom you have engaged as Miss Mary's governess?'

'A Miss Dart. She has taken the highest honours a young woman can compass: has a diploma, very much more imposing than was ever given by the College of Physicians; is highly distinguished in all the ologies, while she is only "favourably mentioned" as regards accomplishments. I suspect she'll be a caution; which, as among her other duties she will have to ward off trespassers on Winthrop's preserve, it is only right and proper she should be. She will probably have sandy hair and red eyes. Talk of an angel and we hear the flutter of her wings. Here's the carriage, just come back with her from the railway station; so you can judge for yourself.'

The two gentlemen turned to the window; which, thanks to an artfully contrived blind, enabled the occupant of the study to command the porch without exposing himself to view, and thereby to decide whether he should be at home, or not at home, to visitors. For the space of three minutes they stood, with their noses flattened against the blind, in silence, till the front door closed, announcing that the new-comer had come in. Then Mr. Christopher Melburn observed to his companion, 'By Jingo! eh!' and Dr. Dalling elevated his eyebrows, and very softly and significantly whistled. When men are alone together their manner of expressing the emotions is primitive.

CHAPTER II.

JEFFERSON.

‘WILL papa consent to your going abroad, do you think, mother?’

‘Yes, darling, I do. At all events, I have done my best.’

‘How good you are to me!’

‘Nonsense! Did you not hear the doctor say that change was essential to me?’

‘But that was after you reminded him what good the baths had done you before.’

‘Well, if you choose to feel that I have conferred an obligation on you, perhaps you will be so good as to help me on to the sofa.’

‘But, suppose papa were to come up and find you there, would he not think——’

‘He will not come up,’ put in the sick lady, quietly. Her tone was confident, but there was a little shiver in it full of sad significance. Most husbands, even those with whom any demonstrativeness of affection is not ‘their way,’ upon hearing such tidings as Christopher Melburn had heard that afternoon, would have come to say a word of comfort and sympathy to their sick wife. It was not only that the time had long gone by, however, in his case for the exhibition of domestic sentiment, but, as she well understood, he would abstain from any such proceeding with a purpose—namely, to mark his disapprobation of the step which he had been compelled at her instigation (as he put it) to consent to. He was by no means convinced of its necessity (he never could be so convinced when anything was disagreeable to him), and even if he had been—but that is a subject, perhaps, into which it is better not to go.

Life is a sacred thing to many natures which never take into consideration matters that alone make it worth the living. We may use no daggers, and yet drain from every vein of those about us the only true life-blood—happiness, affection, hope. It is an operation that is going on every day in the most respectable households; and, to do them justice, without the knowledge—at all events the full knowledge—of the operators. But the patients are very conscious of

it, save where at the last indifference and despair proffer themselves as anæsthetics.

It was twenty years ago since Christopher Melburn had led his second bride to the altar. He had been a widower for the same space of time; but though the bridegroom was middle-aged, a handsomer pair had never been seen in Downshire since his previous nuptials. The bride, though of good family, had little or no fortune; but her youth and beauty were justly held to have made up for that deficiency: though not a love-match in the usual acceptation of the term, it could not be called a marriage of convenience. There was nothing sordid about it, there was no self-sacrifice; and, though the squire's son might well have objected to a stepmother of his own age, there was apparently no opposition. The happy pair passed their honeymoon in Wales, mostly in a carriage and four. Under such circumstances, existence takes the tint of rose-colour, and Christopher Melburn was just the man to shine in them. Their return to Burrow Hall was accomplished in a carriage and pair, and a silver age succeeded the golden one. In due time came the young family and their expenses, which, added to the heavy loss consequent on that futile attempt to save the country, tried the squire's purse-strings and his temper severely. Then Mrs. Melburn fell into ill-health, and lost much of that beauty which was her chief attraction in her husband's eyes: this was not only very hard upon him, but seemed a sort of non-fulfilment of her part of the bargain, and he took little pains to conceal his displeasure. The children, pretty and aristocratic-looking, whom he admitted did her credit, failed and died, to his extreme annoyance, and even the one that survived fell somehow short of what he expected of her.

Mary was fair as a lily but almost as fragile, she was not the companion that he had pictured to himself she would have been to him in his walks and drives; moreover, and this he resented more than all, she ranged herself upon her mother's side, which (so far had matters gone by this time) was equivalent to antagonism. It was true that Jefferson—now a Major in the Dragoons—had not so ranged himself; his attitude, as regards his stepmother, had, to all outward appearances, been always strictly neutral; but the squire was not upon the best of terms with his son. There had been college debts, and other debts, though not of a very serious character, for if the young man's military career had not been brilliant, it had not

been exceptionally expensive. Even these out-goings had ceased; but the squire had an uneasy suspicion that the Major was not living within his allowance, but had borrowed money in anticipation of his own demise.

This idea was wormwood to the squire. The very notion of death was as objectionable to him as it was to Louis XIV.; but that such an event should be speculated upon as regarded himself was treason. That Jefferson did not marry, and thereby repair the family fortunes, had at one time been another cause at first of disappointment and afterwards of disquietude with the squire. But that source of worry had long been dry.

Fortunately, Mary's fortune was in the way of being assured. Mr. Winthrop, one of the magnates of Downshire, was understood to be her suitor, though he was not as yet her betrothed. His habits were a little dissipated, but doubtless he would have sown his wild oats before he became a married man. Such a connection was in every way desirable, and would strengthen the squire's position in the county. But even in this matter there was a hitch. Mary did not give the young gentleman the encouragement he had the right to expect, and, when paternal pressure was exercised, escaped from it on plea of ill-health, and sought sanctuary in her mother's sick room. The squire had no grounds for asserting that his wife connived at her daughter's disobedience, but he suspected it, and this filled his cup of bitterness almost to overflowing. For years the rift between them had been gradually widening, and they had long ceased to have bed or board in common; for though Mrs. Melburn would, on special occasions, take her place at the head of his table, she was generally unequal to the exertion, and took her meals in her own apartments and alone. It was under these circumstances that a companion, under the designation of governess, had become absolutely necessary for Mary Melburn.

Such being the state of affairs at Burrow Hall, it may well be wondered that its mistress should, as she herself had expressed it, 'have done her best,' or indeed, made any effort to bring about an excursion to Germany (or anywhere else), *tête-à-tête* with her lord and master, and indeed it has already been hinted that she had not suggested the idea to the family doctor upon her own account. The truth was, that Fate had dealt with Mrs. Melburn in such a fashion that she no longer lived for herself at all. When I read in the works of certain

philosophers that self-interest is the sole spring of human actions, it seems to me that they are colour-blind; at all events, they are quite unable to recognise that neutral tint in which so many natures, especially those of women, become steeped, through adverse circumstances, in later life. Indifferent to pleasure and inured to woe, they drag their lengthening chain, until the Great Deliverer sets them free; but of any turn in Fortune's wheel in their favour in this world they well know there is no hope. Though no longer sensitive to the blows of Fate themselves, they are often vulnerable enough in the person of some beloved object, whom it is their one solicitude to shield, with all their scanty power, from harm. In Mrs. Melburn's case this object was her daughter. It would have been a small thing to say that she would have died for her: unloved, save by her alone; unhappy, with flagging strength and failing breath, Death had small terrors: she was ready to do far more than die—to live for Mary. All her thoughts, and they were many, were concentrated upon this point; all her intelligence, and it was considerable, was sharpened to this end. And in the meantime, not a duty was neglected. From her sofa she superintended and directed all domestic matters with marvellous skill; and though the means at her disposal were by no means ample, there was no house better looked after in Downshire—none where guests were made more comfortable, or dinners better served—than that of the master of Burrow Hall. Notwithstanding his frequent reflection that he was very hardly treated as regarded matrimonial matters, there were even some people who were of opinion that, after all, he had not made such a bad bargain.

Of the personal appearance of Mrs. Melburn and her daughter nothing need be said, since we shall presently have the opinion of an independent witness upon that point; but while the mistress of the house is being transferred from her bed to her sofa we may give a word or two to Miss Elizabeth Dart, if only in explanation of the extraordinary behaviour of the two gentlemen who had reconnoitred her from behind the blind. That she was most unexpectedly good-looking may be taken for granted; and, indeed, anything more different from the fancy portrait that Mr. Melburn had drawn of her, it would be difficult to imagine. That she was tall and shapely could be seen as she sat in the open carriage; but when she stepped out of it and threw back her veil, she displayed a countenance of really quite exceptional beauty. Her

complexion was dark, almost to olive-colour, but with the blood showing through it in a manner that is seldom seen out of Spain; her eyes were dark, but soft; her hair was jet black, but swept so abruptly off her forehead that it was impossible to judge of its abundance. The expression of her face, which, to match with the rest of her appearance, should have been haughty, was, on the contrary, modest almost to timidity; nevertheless, it was very far from insipid or wanting in self-reliance, and the glance she cast about her on her new surroundings was full of intelligence and observation.

‘Miss Dart, for Mrs. Melburn,’ was her remark to the butler when he opened the door to her, delivered in gentle but very distinct tones; it was a sentence that she had well considered, and yet of the propriety of which she was not quite certain—she thought it sounded too much like a message from the Parcel Delivery Company; but it had, at all events, the desired effect of dissociating her, in the butler’s mind, from an ordinary visitor.

‘If you will wait one minute, Miss, you shall be shown up to my mistress’s room,’ was his reply.

She remained standing in the hall, while the man rang a hand-bell which produced Mrs. Melburn’s maid. There was a short colloquy between the two domestics, and then, with a clumsy word or two of explanation, the new arrival was shown into the breakfast-room. She knew that Mrs. Melburn was an invalid, and guessed at the true state of affairs pretty accurately; still, any delay when we are in a state of anxiety and suspense increases our discomfort. It was with a beating heart, though her face showed nothing of perturbation, that Elizabeth Dart found herself alone. She had never been in so fine a house before, nor even sat in a private carriage; but her mind was of a cast on which mere externals, though they by no means escaped her observation, made little or no impression. With many persons who use the phrase ‘carriage people,’ the former part of the word dominates the latter; but with this young lady humanity came first and its surroundings afterwards. She had only one friend in the world, and she was a hundred miles away; and the question she naturally asked herself was ‘What sort of people have I come to dwell amongst?’ This problem, of which nothing was known to her, absorbed her wholly. Her natural powers of perception, however, took in not only the fact that the room was handsomely furnished, and with great taste, but its

appearance in every particular ; she noticed the landscapes on the walls, the statuettes on the brackets, the church tower that showed itself through the trees, and the shrubbery on which the window looked : this was a gift which exercised itself mechanically, and of the possession of which she herself was only half conscious. But her ear was listening for footsteps, and her mind in somewhat shrinking expectation of what sort of person they would bring with them. In a minute or so the door opened, and, as is usual under such circumstances, gave to her view an individual entirely different from the person she had pictured to herself.

Instead of the invalid lady she had looked for, appeared a military-looking gentleman of middle age, tall and very strongly built, with a bronzed, handsome face, a pair of long tawny moustaches, and bold eyes. Their boldness, however (which was, after all, only characteristic of his martial profession), vanished from them the instant they rested upon her, and was succeeded by a gentle and respectful glance.

‘A thousand pardons,’ he murmured, as she rose to meet him. ‘I was not aware that any one was here. I beg you will sit down.’

‘I regret to hear—that is, I was given to understand—that Mrs. Melburn is less well this afternoon than usual.’

‘Yes ; it is, I am sorry to say, one of her bad days. You had a pleasant journey, I hope, from town.’

‘Thank you ; yes.’

‘You must have found this March wind cold, however, coming over the downs ; they should have sent the closed carriage for you.’

‘Indeed, I was quite comfortable, and enjoyed the drive exceedingly. I have never been on downs before.’

‘One must be upon them on horseback, however, for their thorough enjoyment.’

‘That would be a still more novel experience to me,’ she said, smiling. ‘Miss Melburn is a good horsewoman, no doubt ?’

‘Pretty well ; it will probably be the one thing that we poor ignoramuses will be in a position to teach you.’

The compliment was a little pronounced ; but, coming from her employer (for she had no suspicion that she was addressing any one else), it sounded kind.

‘I am afraid I know very few things,’ she said quietly ; ‘hardly enough to teach me how little I do know.’

'That is beyond me,' returned her companion, gently, smoothing his moustaches. 'You must be prepared to find us all exceedingly slow of comprehension. I think it's the Downshire air. By-the-bye, have they offered you no refreshment?'

He moved to the fireplace and touched the bell-handle, without, however, drawing it out.

'Indeed, Mr. Melburn, I do not need it,' she said hurriedly. 'I had some tea at the junction.'

'And very bad it was, I'll answer for it. Their tea no more comes from China than their teacups.'

'Fortunately I am not much of a connoisseur in tea,' she answered, smiling.

'I dare say you despise all creature comforts,' he said, gravely. 'That is the way with all you intellectual people.'

But, indeed, I am not so intellectual as all that,' she answered, naïvely; whereupon they both broke into a little laugh. In the middle of it the door opened and revealed a young lady so slight and tall, and with such a look of amazement on her pretty face, that she might have stood for a note of admiration. That she had brown hair and eyes, with very delicate features, was conveyed to Elizabeth Dart at the first glance, but the pained astonishment in every lineament of the new comer's face was so marked, that nothing else for the moment impressed itself on her.

On her late companion, however, it produced no effect whatever; he even had his laugh out as though no such interruption had occurred, and then duly observed, 'Better late than never, Miss Mary. Let me introduce you to Miss Dart, whose acquaintance I have had the good fortune to be the first of us to make.'

'I am very sorry,' said Miss Melburn (the phrase seemed to be somehow retrospective, instead of referring, as was intended, to the words that were to follow), 'but mamma was in the act of getting up when you arrived, which prevented my coming down at once to welcome you.'

It was a pretty speech enough, and delivered in the gentlest tone; but to the sensitive ear which it addressed it wanted genuineness, or rather it seemed as though the genuineness which it should by rights have possessed had been wrung out of it. She held out her hand at the same time, but there was a stiffness in the action, and, what was worse, a stiffness that misbecame it, as though formality was

not habitual to her. 'Will you kindly come with me upstairs?' she added.

With a bow to her supposed employer, which he acknowledged by a cheerful 'Au revoir, Miss Dart,' the governess followed her pupil into the hall. That something was wrong somewhere, she was convinced, and she had a strong suspicion that she was held to blame for it, but of its nature she was wholly ignorant.

To feel that upon the very threshold of one's new life one has made a false step is a most discouraging reflection, and, though Elizabeth Dart had as brave a spirit as ever dwelt in woman, her heart sank low within her.

CHAPTER III.

THE INTERVIEW.

THERE is no living-room, to my mind, more pleasant and comfortable than a well-appointed lady's boudoir; the rarity of man's privilege to enter its sacred precincts may enhance its charms, but its intrinsic attractions are indisputable. There is an air of rest as well as of refinement about it that captivates the sense, and which renders the idea of belonging to the gentler sex something more than tolerable—if only one were allowed to smoke. This prohibition did not, of course, affect Miss Elizabeth Dart; and though, as we have said, she was unusually indifferent to external surroundings, the snugness and beauty of Mrs. Melburn's sanctum made no slight impression upon her. To confess the truth, she had never seen a boudoir before; and the reflection it evoked in her was characteristically impersonal and philosophic—'So this is how the rich live; and how even ill-health is mitigated to them.' She involuntarily contrasted in her mind this bright and cheerful room, with its birds and flowers, and the charming view it commanded from its oriel window, with a certain apartment in the New Road, where her Aunt Jane Righton, the sole relative and friend she had in the world, was wont to pass her dreary days. These thoughts occurred to her in a flash, and left her attention fixed upon the figure to which all the rest were mere accessories—the mistress of the room her-

self. Draped in some loose-fitting but becoming robe, ornamented with beautiful designs of the needle (her daughter's handiwork), she lay upon a sofa, propped up by pillows; at once the fairest and most fragile specimen of an English matron eye ever beheld. Her complexion was so exquisite, her countenance so delicate, that she would have looked like a piece of egg-shell china, but for the expression of her countenance, which, though marred by that look of effort which arises from constant pain, and the necessity of overcoming it, was 'spirituelle' in a high degree.

'You will excuse my not rising, Miss Dart,' she said with a gentle smile, and putting out a small transparent hand; 'but I can only afford to do so on occasions of ceremony, of which I hope you do not feel this to be one. You have had a long journey, and must be tired. Pray sit down.'

Then ensued a conversation of the ordinary sort, between employer and employed; a few questions, brief and conventional, and similarly answered, about Miss Dart's belongings, and others put, with scarcely more of interest, respecting her acquirements. She was given to understand that Miss Mary's education had practically ceased; and that what, in fact, was required for her was not so much a governess as a chaperon and companion. This explanation was given with singular skill and delicacy, and without the least air of patronage; but somehow the kindness lacked that personal application which, under the circumstances, would have so much enhanced it. It seemed rather to arise from a disposition naturally gracious, but by no means prone to impulse or confidence in a stranger. Elizabeth Dart had a gift of perception and intuitive knowledge which, to a great extent, made up for her want of experience in life; but she felt that Mrs. Melburn was a problem beyond her powers.

Mary sat silent, with a grave, preoccupied look, that sat strangely upon her pretty face; once only an expression of interest passed over her features—when her mother mentioned that in case, as was possible, she herself should be compelled to pass a month or two for her health abroad, it was probable that her daughter and Miss Dart would spend the time at Casterton, a little town on the south coast, with a sister of Mr. Melburn's.

'You will find it very dull, I fear; but the place is picturesque.'

'It must be very dull to seem dull to me,' said the gover-

ness, smiling. 'When I have not been at school, I have been pupil-teacher in a school; and, with the exception of a few weeks in London with my aunt, I have seen nothing of the world at all.'

'You do not give me that impression, Miss Dart,' was the unexpected rejoinder. It might, of course, have been made in a complimentary sense, but the tone was serious, and Elizabeth Dart felt the colour rising in her cheeks.

'What I mean to say,' explained Mrs. Melburn, hastily, 'was that you have none of that *mauvaise honte* and awkwardness of manner which one generally associates with ignorance of that kind.'

'We learnt deportment at Acacia Lodge,' returned the governess, with a forced smile.

'Still, it is unusual to find social defects of that sort supplied by any assistance from without. Shut up in my sick-room, for example, I know that I become selfish and egotistic in spite of myself—which reminds me that I have kept you sitting here with your bonnet on without offering you any refreshment. We do not dine till seven.'

'Thank you, no. Mr. Melburn was so good as to offer me a cup of tea; but, as I told him, I had some at the junction.'

'Mr. Melburn? Indeed!'

There was a surprise in Mrs. Melburn's tone which grated on the other's ear. Was it so very extraordinary, then, that the master of Burrow Hall should have condescended so far as to offer refreshment to a governess, she wondered?

'It was not papa,' put in Mary, with that reluctant haste which young persons use when making an unpleasant communication: 'it was Jefferson.'

'Jefferson!' Mrs. Melburn's surprise was even greater than before, and this time mingled with decided disapprobation. Her face, too, as she looked up sharply at the new comer, showed open displeasure. Miss Dart's position was certainly embarrassing, but the reflection that she was in no way answerable for any mistake that might have occurred prevented her from feeling embarrassment. The colour mounted high into her cheeks, but it was from indignation that, for the second time, blame should be unjustly imputed to her, rather than from confusion. When the light on a card-table is weak it is difficult to discover hearts from diamonds, and, without sufficient data, one cannot pronounce with certainty whether the cause of a young girl's blush is

modesty or shame. There was no doubt, however, in the mind of Elizabeth Dart which of them in her case Mrs. Melburn took it for. The governess remained obstinately, perhaps audaciously, silent.

‘The gentleman who received you,’ said Mrs. Melburn, in chilling tones, ‘was not, it appears, my husband, but my stepson, Major Melburn.’

Then, in her turn, somewhat haughtily and with an almost imperceptible inclination of the head, Miss Dart replied, ‘Indeed!’

Her pride, though not her temper, was fairly roused. Though willing to put her hand, and with unusual vigour, to any work, however humble, and to earn even the bitter bread of dependence without repining, she had great independence of character. She stood, as she thought, in the presence of an insolent woman, who having grudged her a civility, such as any man might pay to any girl, at her husband’s hands, was still more wroth to find that it had been paid to her by another. Major Melburn’s manner might, under the circumstances (as she now understood them), have been somewhat familiar, but it had been at least frank and kind. She greatly preferred it to the affected graciousness and artificial courtesy with which she had been received upstairs. This was unfortunate, as it was with those upstairs and no others that her lot was cast. If there had been time to draw distinctions, she might perhaps have excepted the younger of her two companions from this sweeping conclusion; but when we are young we resent the misjudgment of our contemporaries even more than that of our elders; we have a closer claim upon their sympathy, and—to express it in homely terms—it is not their business to preach to us. Mary Melburn, it was true, had by no means preached to her; but she had shown downstairs a wholly uncalled-for displeasure—though distress would have been a better word, had Miss Dart had leisure for picking and choosing of terms; while in the boudoir, though she had done nothing hostile, she had done nothing to smooth matters. Surely she might have said something to explain away the error into which her companion and friend that was to be had fallen, instead of confining herself to that bare statement of fact, ‘It was not papa; it was Jefferson.’

There was some more talk, upon other matters, but there was now a stiffness in Mrs. Melburn’s tone, quite different from the formality inseparable from a first acquaintance. It

was a great relief to the new comer when the interview was terminated by her employer suggesting that the domestic should show her to her room and see that she had everything she required.

What she required was solitude—the opportunity of thinking over her position and reviewing her own conduct. She could not conceal from herself that the impression she had made at Burrow Hall was, somehow or another, an unfortunate one. From Mary Melburn's manner, it was clear that she perceived this, and did her best to do away with it—nay, it seemed to Miss Dart that once or twice the young lady was on the point of saying something to soften and perhaps elucidate matters. However, she had not done so: it was plain that she was shy and nervous even in her solicitude for the other's comfort.

'We dine in three-quarters of an hour,' she had said. 'I will come and fetch you.'

Then, as she turned to leave the room, something in her companion's face appeared to touch her. She came back and held out her hand. 'It must all seem very strange and lonely to you here, but I am sure we shall be good friends.'

'Indeed, I hope so,' said Miss Dart, gratefully. She could not say, as she wished to do, 'I am sure we shall,' for her character was obstinately truthful; but the tears rose to her eyes and supplied what was wanting.

A kind word in season, how good it is! She felt at once that things were not so bad as they had seemed before it was spoken, and that she would be able to 'get on' with Miss Melburn at least, if not with her mother. Yet what had she done to make the 'getting on' with the elder lady seem so problematical? She was not unacquainted with the peculiarities of invalids, and could make allowance for them; but she could find no clue to Mrs. Melburn's annoyance and displeasure. Her best guess at it—and she acknowledged to herself it was but a poor one—was that her mistake in taking Major Melburn for his father had wounded her employer's *amour-propre*. It had perhaps implied that a husband of her own age would have been more becoming than one old enough to be her father; but this left Miss Melburn's strange behaviour still unaccounted for, since it could not have arisen from the same cause. Though she had not expected to find a life of dependence without a thorn, she had not bargained for a hidden thorn.

CHAPTER IV.

AT DINNER.

A GIRL's first ball is a great experience, but it is not such an ordeal as her first dinner-party. In the former case, there is, mixed with her apprehensions, no inconsiderable expectation of enjoyment; whereas, in the latter, there are only tremors. I remember seeing one little lady—though by no means a child—astonish the strange gentleman who offered his arm to take her downstairs by bursting into tears. The joys of the table are exclusively for the mature. What are even turtle and venison to the maiden of blushing sixteen, or even eighteen, who must needs partake of them in unfamiliar company? Better a dinner of herbs—or, at least, of hashed mutton—where ease of manner is, than eight courses, eaten on our best behaviour. Miss Elizabeth Dart was more than eighteen—she was, indeed, three or four and twenty—but she had never before made one of a dinner-party. The class of society to which she had been accustomed did not affect that form of entertainment: they lunched heavily in the middle of the day, and in the evening took meat teas. Social differences of the superficial kind, it is true, did not much move her; it was natural to her to dive below them for something of more intrinsic worth; nor was she by any means what is commonly known as 'shy'—she had a sense of proportion, a consciousness of possessing powers greatly above the average, which forbade that feeling. A large party would not have alarmed her more than a small one; but of however many it might consist on the present occasion, she would certainly find herself the only stranger among them. If a young girl convoyed by her mother feels diffident and nervous in such a position, it was surely not to be wondered at that, having attired herself as sprucely as her modest wardrobe permitted, it was with some flutter of anxiety that Elizabeth Dart awaited the return of the young lady who was to be at once both her pupil and her cicerone. Mary Melburn entered her room with a smile, superimposed, however, upon a grave countenance. It seemed as certain to the new governess as though she had been a witness to it, that some conversation about her had passed in the interim between mother and daughter which had been of a serious and not quite satisfactory kind.

‘Mamma is not well enough to dine downstairs to-day,’ she said; ‘there will be no one but papa and Jefferson and one visitor.’

If this speech was, as seemed probable, an excuse for the absence of Mrs. Melburn, Elizabeth Dart was only too happy to accept it, since the presence of the mistress of the house as chaperon would, she felt, have been far from reassuring. As to the visitor, whoever he might be, he was not so formidable in her apprehensions as the master of the house; that that gentleman was also her employer was a circumstance, of course, which also placed her at a great disadvantage as regards ordinary young ladies making their *début*. It was once observed to me by a well-known writer, famous for his ‘saving common-sense,’ that notwithstanding the bother made about governesses in the way of pity, no sooner do they burst into full bloom as successful schoolmistresses, than we have not a civil word for them. The conclusion he drew was that our views in both cases were exaggerated, and that, even when our Becky Sharpes are all they ought to be, they are not to be so greatly commiserated. With all respect for his judgment, I still take leave to think that their position is very sad and pitiful: they are not only dependent in the ordinary sense, as respects their employers, but more or less at the mercy of any one in the house who may chance to take a dislike to them. While, on the other hand, matters become even still more unpleasant if any member of the opposite sex takes it into his head to pay them any marked attention.

The mind of Miss Elizabeth Dart, however, was of neither a morbid nor desponding cast, and though that trip on the threshold of her new home, which she had so unconsciously made, did somewhat depress her, she was resolved, if possible, to recover her lost ground, and at all events to make the best of matters.

In the drawing-room were three gentlemen, all of whom rose as the two ladies entered the room. Mr. Melburn’s manner as he came forward and welcomed the new comer to Burrow Hall impressed her favourably. His handsome face smiled upon her with benignity, and his tone, if somewhat patronising, had also something paternal in it. ‘My son Jefferson, it seems, you have already seen?’ The Major nodded good-naturedly; though he said nothing, his face seemed to wear an encouraging look, for which she could not but be grateful: it looked to her like a friend’s face. ‘Mr.

Winthrop, like yourself, is from London, and has only joined our circle to-day.'

'Sorry I did not come by the earlier train,' observed Mr. Winthrop with an elaborate bow, 'since I might have been of use to Miss Dart.'

What use he could possibly have been it was difficult to imagine, as Miss Dart had travelled second-class, and had needed no assistance in drinking her cup of tea; but the aspiration was, at all events, a polite one. Mr. Winthrop, a tall, ungainly-looking gentleman, with a face like a horse—it had possibly acquired the resemblance from association with that quadruped, for he was very equine in his tastes—was, indeed, the pink of politeness. When he addressed a lady, he invariably bowed, which caused the glass, always stuck in his eye, to fall out of it, and gave one the impression of something mechanical. He wore a constant smile, which perhaps from long usage had become weak, for it now resembled a simper; and though a young man—not more than thirty at the most—his crop of hay-coloured hair was very scanty, and had deserted the uppermost and less fertile regions of his head altogether. His loose, limited figure looked no doubt to less advantage than it otherwise would have done contrasted with the stalwart frame of the Major, or even with the erect and still shapely form of the master of the house; but what was in stronger contrast still was the expression of his face, which was timid, and lacked the force of character which distinguished both father and son.

It was easy to see, however, that, despite these shortcomings, Mr. Winthrop occupied a high place in the estimation of both these gentlemen. His utterances, though of a commonplace kind, were listened to with great attention, and his opinions, if not very strong in themselves, had always the advantage of corroboration. Little as she knew of life, the quick-eyed governess soon came to the conclusion that Mr. Winthrop was possessed of something in the way of wealth or position that exacted homage; but whether Mary Melburn's conduct towards him was dictated by respect, or dislike, she was not so sure. He paid her such attentions as would have been considered marked even in a 'squire of dames,' and she received them with a frigid courtesy that might either be the acknowledgment of such patronage or a sign of its rejection.

When dinner was announced, and he offered his arm to her, Miss Dart noticed that she laid her hand on it as lightly

as though it had been a broken limb, and that not a word escaped from her lips during their passage into the dining-room. Mr. Melburn himself, who was, of course, her own escort, conversed with grave condescension, and explained to her as they passed the sideboard the presence of an array of silver cups upon it, which he saw had attracted her attention.

'You must not think they are meant for drinking purposes,' he said, smiling, 'and still less that they are exhibited from ostentation; but when Mr. Winthrop is here we like to remind him that other families besides his own have distinguished themselves in the field.'

'Miss Dart will conclude that we have won these things in battle, sir,' said the Major, who was walking behind them, 'unless you are a little more explicit. They are only coursing cups.'

The explanation was not altogether superfluous, for she had never seen such trophies of the chase, and was amazed at their size and splendour.

She had heard of 'going to the dogs' as a term for poverty, but it seemed to her that these animals might be a source of wealth; her ignorance of how such things were come by was similar to that of a child who, looking into a jeweller's shop, concludes that a goldsmith must needs be a Croesus.

'They must be very valuable,' she murmured.

'They cost a deal of money, at all events,' said the Squire, drily. Then added, in a tone that was meant to be heard, 'It is only men like our friend Mr. Winthrop who can afford to be successful in the coursing-field.'

In this speech, as it seemed to the governess, her host gave the keynote of the conversation. There were not many subjects besides his personal ailments, and his family tree, on which Mr. Winthrop could talk with comfort to himself, but coursing happened to be one of them. The subject was a much more generally acceptable one than it seemed likely to be, for, while it was a familiar topic to Mr. Melburn and his son, its very novelty had an attraction for Miss Dart, who was never better pleased than when acquiring information which at the same time gave her an insight into social life. As for Mary Melburn, she seemed to welcome it because it afforded her an excuse for silence while listening to the outpourings of her neighbour's enthusiasm. The ladies were but very rarely appealed to; but, in answer to some question

put to her by the Major about greyhounds, Miss Dart was obliged to confess that her sole acquaintance with them was derived from books.

'Of course,' she said, 'I delight in Sir Walter's Maida; but that, I believe, was a deerhound.'

'What Sir Walter was that?' inquired Mr. Winthrop. 'I know a Sir Walter Ross, who courses down in Berkshire.'

'I was speaking of Sir Walter Scott,' she replied, not a little abashed at having been the unwilling cause of the discovery of such ignorance.

'I always thought it strange he didn't call the dog Salamanca,' observed the Squire gravely. 'In England, we always call greyhounds—so far as the first letter goes, at least—after our own names. It would have been quite natural for me to own a Maida—I dare say you have not got a single dog, Winthrop, whose name does not begin with a "W."'

'There's Wilkie, and Wentworth, and Wildrake, who won the cup from your Marrowbones at Ashdown, last year.'

'You needn't tell me that,' said the Squire, ruefully.

'You see there are some things that we can teach you, even in Downshire, Miss Dart,' said the Major in a low voice. His tone was sarcastic; but, as she well understood, the sarcasm did not apply to herself. Perhaps she would rather it had done so, since it seemed to take for granted a certain contempt for her company, or, at all events, for one member of it, which it distressed her to have imputed. On the other hand, it was not displeasing to her to find some one who could enter into her feelings, and, above all, who had taken the trouble to let her know that he had done so. She felt lonely and out of her element; and sympathy of any kind, under such circumstances, is very grateful. In addition to the strangeness of all things about her, there seemed to be a mystery of some kind brooding over matters at Burrow Hall, though it only betrayed itself in silence. It was odd, for example, to say the least of it, that not a word was dropped concerning the hostess of the house; no expression of regret for her absence or its cause; no hint even of her existence. The governess's reading was extensive, and had comprised many works of fiction, and she had gathered from it that the domestic affections were not so much cultivated among the higher ranks as in that in which she had been accustomed to

move, but that Mr. Winthrop should not have asked Mary Melburn a question about her mother's health when they first met in the drawing-room seemed strange indeed. Little by little she came to understand that Burrow Hall was one of those unhappy houses denounced in the Scriptures,—‘a house divided against itself,’ but for what reason it was so, or even into what camps it was divided, she did not learn till long afterwards.

In the meantime, having very literally started their hare, it seemed that the topic of coursing, among Mr. Melburn's guests, was never to be exhausted.

It was better than a talk about bullocks, because there was necessarily more movement, though it did not move *on* ; but to poor Miss Dart, who had never seen a hare, except in a poulterer's shop, it would have been insufferably tedious, save for a way she had, under similar circumstances, of disengaging herself from the train of talk about her like a slip-carriage. This operation did not take the common form of dreaming, a dangerous custom which is apt to put him who practises it in an embarrassing position ; she only exchanged the concrete for the abstract, and while permitting her thoughts to range over a wider surface, still kept them sufficiently fixed upon what was going on about her. Often and often had she excited Aunt Jane's astonishment by her comments on the feelings and motives of their common friends after an evening passed in their company, where she had borne her full share in the conversation, and to all appearance had been as much absorbed in it as they were.

‘What a strange girl you are, Lizzie,’ she would say, half in admiration, half in alarm, at she knew not what ; ‘you seem to turn everybody inside out. I can't help thinking you would make your fortune if you took to the trade of character-telling, like that romancer over the way.’

The romancer was a chiromancer on the other side of the street, who professed, by spreading your fingers out (and probably putting his own to his nose as soon as your back was turned), to define your moral and intellectual qualities, and to suggest the profession most suitable to their exercise. This was not high praise, but perhaps (for praise when we are young goes far, and is almost as satisfactory as pudding) it had encouraged Miss Dart to continue her speculations. It was a habit at all events that had become confirmed by this time, and was destined to bear fruit, which was no more

dreamt of at present than 'the music in the eggs of the nightingale.'

'Did these people talk?' she was wondering now, 'for the sake of talking, and because they had nothing better to talk about, or with a motive?' She knew that with persons of a low intellectual type, the mere use of the faculty of expression is gratifying to them. What else can explain the repetition of a remark in different words that we so often hear? But she had a higher opinion of her host's intelligence than this, and a higher one still of the Major's. The whole conversation, she concluded, was framed to suit Mr. Winthrop: but was it to please him generally, or with a more direct object? This riddle, which may appear uninteresting to persons who investigate double acrostics with enthusiasm, soon got to have a strong attraction for her.

'By-the-bye,' observed Mr. Melburn, during a short pause, 'we must remember that to-morrow is our last day this season. I am glad to see the glass is rising.'

'It would make precious little difference to me,' said Mr. Winthrop, 'if it was stuck at "much rain"—indeed, for Wilhelmina's sake I should prefer a wet day, for her best chance is when the ground is heavy.'

'I was thinking of the ladies,' remarked Mr. Melburn, drily, 'not of the dogs.'

'To be sure,' put in Mr. Winthrop, bowing towards his fair neighbour, and dropping his eyeglass on his dessert plate, where it fell on a slice of pear, 'that is a sunshine we cannot dispense with. You will honour us with your presence, Miss Melburn, of course?'

'Thank you, no. Clappers Down is scarcely a spot for the carriage, the hills are too precipitous.'

'Then why not ride?' observed her father, with a frown on his high forehead, and a sharpness in his tone which fairly startled the governess: it was like the development of a new note in some familiar instrument.

'I cannot ride alone, and run the chance of being the only lady at the meeting,' observed Mary, quietly, 'as happened once before. I remember your objecting to it, yourself, papa.'

Mr. Melburn bit his lip; there is no argument so unwelcome, because so unanswerable, as that which is taken out of our own mouths and used against ourselves.

'But why should not Miss Dart ride?' he inquired, peevishly.

The question should by rights, of course, have been addressed to Miss Dart herself; we do not generally use the third person in conversation when the first is sitting next to us; but when the Squire was crossed, his manners, like those of many other people, were wont to lose their polish. His tone, indeed, was distinctly irritable; if his words had been paraphrased, they would, it seemed to the shrinking ears of the governess, have run thus—‘Why won’t she ride? What’s she here for but to be chaperon whether on horse or foot?’

It was plain by the blush on her cheek that Miss Melburn understood what was passing in her new friend’s mind.

‘Papa forgets, Miss Dart,’ she observed apologetically, ‘that folk who do not live on the downs as we do are not all born centaurs.’

‘I have never ridden a horse in my life,’ said the governess, quietly.

Mr. Winthrop looked at her with amazement, and for once without dropping his eye-glass. ‘Then what *do* you ride?’ he inquired, with simplicity.

‘A zebra,’ exclaimed the Major, gravely. ‘Unfortunately, however, her steed will not come in time for to-morrow.’

‘Jefferson is joking, Winthrop,’ explained Mr. Melburn, for that gentleman’s jaw had dropped in something like consternation. ‘Come, let us have our tobacco.’

At this unmistakable hint the two young ladies rose at once—the Major holding wide the door for them—and repaired to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER V.

SORCERY.

It is doubtful whether either of the two young ladies experienced much sense of relief from their escape from the dining-room. It would have been impossible for them, considering their mutual relations, to discuss the company they had just quitted; but, in any case, the governess would have felt the topic to have been a dangerous one, for during the whole meal Mary Melburn had struck her as being hardly less ill at ease, or less in accord with those about her, than herself.

At the same time, silence upon a topic so obvious was embarrassing. The consciousness of having annoyed the master of the house by her inexperience as a horsewoman also weighed upon her mind ; she felt that she had made as unfavourable an impression upon him as his wife. After two such false starts, it seemed almost impossible that her career at Burrow Hall should run smoothly.

With her young companion herself she was better pleased than her behaviour at first had led her to expect. Miss Melburn's manner to her at dinner had been considerate, and even kind ; but even with her she felt by no means sure of her footing : while the young lady, on her part, showed none of that frankness and confidence which might have been looked for at her years. Her manner, it is true, was gentle and courteous ; but there was a coldness, or at least a caution, about it that could not be mistaken. 'This was the more painful to Elizabeth Dart, since from the diagnosis she had, as usual, formed of the other's character, such reticence seemed to be foreign to it.

Miss Melburn treated the new comer rather as a visitor than one who was to be a resident with her under the same roof ; and, though solicitous enough for her comfort and amusement, made but little effort to make her feel at home. She drew her attention to the books upon the table, to the pictures on the walls, and, finally, to that last refuge of the drawing-room destitute, the family photograph album. To Miss Dart this was a welcome object. For the faces of our friends, as being in some sort 'the company we keep,' afford an index to our own characters ; and where all is dark (and it was so with her as regarded all her surroundings), even the light of a farthing candle is acceptable.

The first picture represented the Squire himself in uniform, with his hand upon his sword, and with such an ultra-military expression of countenance as might have fitted some commander giving orders for the sacking of a city.

'I did not know that your father had been in the Army,' observed the governess.

'Nor has he,' returned Mary, with a smile ; 'that is the dress of the Deputy-Lieutenant of the county.'

There is no class of people who feel their ignorance so much as those who have really been well educated ; and at that moment poor Miss Dart would willingly have sunk through the floor and taken her chance of what lay beneath

it. She nervously continued her examination of the volume, wherein the Squire still figured in various characters—dispensing justice as Chairman of the Quarter Sessions; on horseback, with the initials ‘M.F.H.’ under him, a mystery into which Miss Dart did not venture to inquire; as an orator addressing some popular assembly. Over this she lingered a little (as well she might), until Mary murmured, ‘That was when papa stood for Downshire. He didn’t get in, you know;’ which was another blow.

Then there came a portrait of the Major in his war-paint; and a handsome chief he looked.

‘That is Jefferson, of course,’ said Mary, drily. It seemed to Miss Dart that there was some reproof in the speech—which somehow brought the colour to her cheeks—because the page was not turned over on the instant.

‘What a very lovely creature!’ she exclaimed, as she came upon the next portrait. It represented a young girl attired in a ball dress, and selecting a flower from a bouquet with grave significance. With all its youth and beauty, the face was not a happy one; the eyes had trouble in them, and the mouth had doubt and even dread about it.

‘This is from a picture, not from life,’ observed Miss Dart.

‘It is,’ was the quiet rejoinder; ‘but they tell me it was very like.’

‘I have never seen a face so beautiful in real life.’

‘And yet you have seen that very face; it is the portrait of my mother when she was eighteen.’

The eyes of the speaker were suffused with tears, and her voice trembled with emotion.

‘I see the likeness now,’ said the governess, gently; ‘I am afraid your mother must have suffered much.’

It was clear, indeed, that years alone could never have brought so marked a change.

‘She has been a great sufferer all her life,’ returned Miss Melburn, gravely.

‘Poor soul, poor soul!’ were the words that rose to Miss Dart’s lips, but they did not pass them. It struck her that a governess should not venture to be so sympathetic to her superiors; and yet she could hardly say, ‘Poor lady, poor lady!’

To be silent must needs seem to be unfeeling; but in the meantime the moments were fleeting by; and with every

moment speech, as is usual under such circumstances, became more difficult to her.

'I am very sorry,' at last she murmured; an expression so conventional that she felt it must appear to be dictated by indifference, or perhaps even by antagonism.

'That is my Aunt Meyrick,' observed Miss Mary, turning the next page with her own hand, 'with whom we are probably to stay at Casterton.'

This lady, to judge by her portrait, would be at least ten years the Squire's junior; there was some resemblance between them in feature, but none in expression. The widow was less handsome, but more pleasing; the mouth had none of the Squire's decision about it, and the eyes were gentle to timidity.

'It is a very pleasant face,' was Miss Dart's involuntary remark.

'Aunt Meyrick is a *dear!*' exclaimed Miss Melburn, enthusiastically; 'and this is "a dear," too, in his way, though it is a very different way.'

The picture showed a dwarfish and almost deformed man, with a face full of wrinkles, redeemed by eyes of keen intelligence. His apparel was homely in the extreme. He had a disc in his hand, such as electro-biologists place in the hands of their victims before proceeding to experiment upon them.

'Now, what would you say this gentleman was—for a gentleman he is, though of humble birth?' inquired Mary, with a smile.

'Well, I should say,' said Miss Dart, after a moment's consideration, 'that he was an enthusiast; and although an antiquarian, very fond of at least one person who has not age to recommend her—yourself.'

'You must be a magician, Miss Dart!' exclaimed the other, in astonishment; 'you have described Mr. Leyden to a nicety. If it is not contrary to the rules of the Black Art, would you mind telling me by what means you read his character so correctly?'

'Nothing is more simple,' returned the governess, smiling; 'his eyes betray his enthusiasm, the antique coin in his hand suggested the nature of his pursuit, and the tone in which you spoke of him assured me of your great regard for him, which in such a case must needs be reciprocated.'

'We are very simple, superstitious folk on the downs

here,' said Miss Melburn, smiling in her turn; 'and if this gift of yours should be generally known, you will run some risk of being burnt as a sorcerer.'

'Still my art has its limits, and I confess this young gentleman puzzles me,' said the governess as she turned over the next page. Her manner had become unconsciously natural: the barriers, or one of them, between herself and her companion had been suddenly removed. Mary, on her part, found herself, for the first time, not only interested in, but drawn towards, the new comer. She remained silent, watching her narrowly. The portrait was of a young man of two or three and twenty, slender and pale, extended on a couch, with a book in his hand, on which, however, his eyes were not fixed. They rested on the ground with a thoughtful, intent expression. The face was one of great beauty; but, if not positively effeminate, it lacked vigour.

'Perhaps it may help you,' said Mary, after a long pause, 'to tell you what somebody else remarked whose opinion was asked upon the same subject: he said, "That young gentleman looks like a girl in boy's clothes, and must be uncommonly lazy."'

'Whoever said that,' said Miss Dart, quietly, 'could never have studied Lavater, nor his fellow-creatures. In the first place, it is clear that this young man is an invalid; I should say, by the pose of the limbs, a chronic invalid.'

The profound silence that followed this remark was broken by a suppressed sigh.

'The book,' continued Miss Dart, gravely—'though, to be sure, he is not reading it—is rather misleading. It is not the sort of book, to judge from the outside, I should have expected to see him with.'

'It is the history of the Anglo-Saxon coinage,' observed Miss Mary.

'Just so. Well, he doesn't care about the book, you see, but is only trying to read it; perhaps, to please his friend, Mr. Leyden.'

'A witch, a witch!' cried Miss Mary, clapping her hands delightedly. 'Go on; oh, please go on!'

'Well, I am not sure,' proceeded Miss Dart, with deliberation: 'I may lose my reputation as a sorceress by such a monstrous suggestion, but the Sybil within me prompts me to pronounce this young gentleman to be a poet.'

'It is marvellous—it is amazing—you are quite right!'

exclaimed Miss Mary, in a breath. 'Hush!—they are coming in from the dining-room.'

In an instant she had put back the photograph-album in its place, and turning to the piano affected to be busied with her music-book. The echoing hall was at the same time filled with voices, and the three gentlemen trooped in.

CHAPTER VI.

JEFFERSON ASKS A FAVOUR.

MR. WINTHROP looked in high spirits, and slightly flushed, the Major somewhat bored, and the Squire like a man who has been put out, and has a great objection to the process. He brushed by the governess as if she had been a piece of furniture, and took up his usual position with his back to the fire, and his arms under his coat-tails. Instead of deriving the usual satisfaction from that attitude, it was plain from the frown on his brow, and the way he looked about him, that he was in a state of discontent. His lips moved not 'as if in prayer,' but the contrary. Miss Dart even thought she caught the word 'idiot' pronounced under his breath; his eyes were at that moment fixed on the pair by the piano, but whether the remark was applied to his daughter or his guest was doubtful: perhaps he used it as a noun of multitude.

'And what have you ladies been doing with yourselves, Miss Dart?' inquired the Major, in sprightly tones.

'Nothing of a very elevating nature, I am afraid,' she answered. 'We have been looking at photographs.'

'What, already?' was his somewhat enigmatical rejoinder. 'The Governor in his armour, eh? and our sisters and our cousins and our aunts?'

'Not your sister. I am surprised to find her conspicuous by her absence; not, however, that she would make a good photograph, because she has so much expression.'

'Why don't you say what one young lady generally does say of another under such circumstances, "because her beauty lies in her expression"?''

'Because I do not think so. To my thinking, Miss Melburn is beautiful in both ways, only the sun seldom succeeds in catching the second way.'

‘It is very kind of you to take that rose-coloured view of her.’

‘Does not everybody do so?’ Miss Dart’s eyes involuntarily wandered, as she spoke, towards the piano, at which Miss Mary was sitting down to play, with Mr. Winthrop standing at her side regarding her, glass in eye, with evident admiration.

‘He’ll break that glass against the keys of the piano, I’ll bet a guinea, before he’s turned over half-a-dozen leaves,’ said the Major, parenthetically. ‘Well, I don’t know as to everybody; brothers, you know, are not apt to be enthusiastic about their sisters’ charms.’

‘I should have thought, on the contrary, that they would have been the very persons to take pride in them.’

‘Indeed; well, you see, I’m only a half-brother,’ said the Major, smiling. ‘The cousin, by-the-bye, has been trotted out, of course?’

‘The cousin? What cousin? I don’t understand you.’

‘Matt Meyrick, the poet. If the photograph-book was exhibited, Mary has surely introduced you to the young gentleman.’

‘Not by name. There was, I remember, a portrait of a young man, an invalid.’

‘You may call a man so who has paralysis of the spine, I suppose; but it’s a very delicate way of putting it.’

‘Is it really so bad as that? Poor fellow!’

‘He has his compensations, however. In the first place, he has a better opinion of his own talents—I beg his pardon, of his genius—than any young man in the world. Then he is the idol of his mother. He has also an independent worshipper, a mad numismatist; and there’s Mary. There are very few people who can boast of three creatures who believe in them; I should be very glad,’ here the Major sank his voice a little, ‘to have *one*.’

‘These things depend on one’s deserts, I fancy,’ said the governess, quietly.

‘That extinguishes me altogether,’ returned the Major, smiling; but he did not look extinguished nevertheless. His air was gay and his face was bright as he stood beating time to the music, which had now begun, and he certainly looked a very handsome fellow.

The Squire, with one coat-tail under his arm, as an officer carries his sword, now began to move towards the piano with

the caution of a sportsman stalking deer ; he was fond of music in his way, and his dissatisfied soul seemed to become soothed by it, though his brow was still far from clear. No sooner had he departed from her vicinity than Miss Dart became conscious of a voice addressing her from above, as gently as falls the dew from Heaven. It was, of course, the Major's voice ; but, as his head was nodding to the music, and his eyes fixed on the musician, it was difficult to connect him with it.

'This may be the only opportunity, Miss Dart, I may have to say to you,' it murmured, 'that, if you could reconsider your determination not to go to the coursing to-morrow, you would lay us all under a great obligation. I do not make use of the argument which would have the greatest weight with most people, that your doing so would be the shortest way of conciliating the authorities' (here he nodded—out of time—towards the Squire) 'because I do not think you a person to be actuated by self-interest. I am asking you a favour—not a personal one, of course—but in the name of the family.'

'But how *can* I go?' inquired the governess, in great distress of mind. The manner of the application embarrassed her quite as much as the proposition itself, and yet it was perfectly respectful ; moreover, though he put self-interest out of the question, she could hardly doubt from the kindness of his face that he really had her own advantage in view. 'As I told Mr. Melburn at dinner, I have never been on horseback in my life.'

'But that is one of the few things that we can teach you ; you will certainly have to learn it ; so why should you not take your first lesson to-morrow morning ? I can promise you the steadiest of steeds, and that if you feel the least nervous, you shall never be left by yourself even for a minute. I knew what a comfort that is when, five years ago, I first learnt to ride a bicycle.'

'But I shall shame you all with my awkwardness, and look so ludicrous.'

'I venture to differ from you there,' said the Major, gravely ; 'the saddle will not seem a stranger place to you than Burrow Hall, and I prophesy that within a week you will ride like Diana. I mean, of course, Diana Vernon.'

'Well, I will speak to your sister about it,' said the governess, hesitatingly, 'and if she will take the risk of such a companion——'

'Pardon me—I would not do that,' interposed the Major ; 'she has already said that she could not leave you at home alone, and I don't think she would like to lay herself under an obligation to you, as it were, by pressing the matter. Now, though to me I must confess your going or staying at home will make a difference, I am not the principal party concerned, and have therefore ventured to plead with you. If you would tell my father to-night, without mentioning my mediation of course, that you had agreed to make one of our party to Clapper's Down, it would give him great pleasure—I wish I could say that it would do so on your account ; but the compliment would be transparent ; even if you believed me, you would not thank me afterwards for introducing you to a fool's paradise. I trust, Miss Dart, that I have not offended you by my plain speaking ?'

'No, no ; it is not that,' she answered, hurriedly (for the music was already dying away) ; 'since it seems that the matter is really of some importance, I promise you I will go to Clapper's Down.'

'A thousand thanks ! Bravo ! bravo !' His two latter words were a tribute to the musician, but to his companion's ear they had a touch of triumph as well as applause. It was natural, however, that he should be gratified by having overcome her scruples ; it was also 'nice of him,' though it was a mere civility, to say that her going to the meet would make a difference to him. There was not much in common, nor likely to be, between her humble self and the Major ; but in the strange and frigid atmosphere in which she found herself, his kind and frank advice came to her like a ray of sunshine on a wintry day.

When Elizabeth Dart had once given a promise, its performance, however unpleasant to herself, if it lay within her power, was certain ; and if no opportunity had offered itself of speaking to Mr. Melburn respecting her readiness to join the party to-morrow, she would, somehow or other, have made one. She had made up her mind to speak when Mr. Winthrop should have taken his departure ; but, as it turned out, that gentleman was sleeping in the house. He was still in the room when, to her surprise and confusion, Mary rose from her chair and with an 'It is getting late, and I am sure you must be tired, Miss Dart, with your long journey,' prepared to leave the drawing-room.

The Squire's brow clouded at once ; it seemed to the gover-

ness, from the glance he cast at her, that she was for the second time incurring his displeasure.

‘I hope when you have slept upon it, Mary,’ he said, in a tone half of persuasion, half of discontent, ‘that you will reconsider your determination with respect to to-morrow.’

‘I don’t see how, under the circumstances, it can well be altered, papa,’ she answered gently, with a look at Miss Dart, the significance of which, however, it was difficult to translate. It might have referred to the expedition in question, or to their going upstairs.

‘I believe,’ said the governess, modestly, ‘that it is possible for a person, however insignificant, to interfere with the public enjoyment. Pray do not consider, Mr. Melburn, my unwillingness to venture on horseback as a refusal. Rather than spoil any one’s pleasure, I will go, of course.’

The effect of the speech, though it was not impromptu, was far greater than the speaker had anticipated.

‘Come, that’s well!’ cried the Squire, with much satisfaction. ‘We are all obliged to you, Miss Dart.’

‘Yes, indeed,’ assented Mr. Winthrop, with enthusiasm. ‘She shall have one of my horses, if she likes; Clinker will carry her like a lamb.’

‘Like a lamb that is rather apt to skip, however,’ observed the Major, drily. Save to Miss Dart, who knew of course that he was prepared for it, he must have seemed to take her change of purpose with *gauche* indifference.

‘She must ride Seaman,’ said the Squire, decisively; ‘he will carry her like a rock.’

The governess noticed that Mary Melburn had said nothing, which was an embarrassing circumstance, for it was to her, and not to the gentlemen, that she had naturally looked for an acknowledgment of her offer. It was plain that it had made an impression on her; but it could hardly have been a favourable one, for the delicate pink of her cheeks had deepened into rose colour, and from her eyes there shot a glance of pained surprise.

‘If Miss Dart wishes to go,’ she said, presently, with evident effort, ‘of course, there is nothing more to be said.’

‘Oh, but indeed I don’t wish it,’ exclaimed the governess, not without some little resentment. She felt it hard that a self-sacrifice should thus be treated as though it were a self-indulgence. ‘I only offered.’

‘What does it signify? The matter’s settled,’ said the

Squire, authoritatively. 'Remember, young ladies, we breakfast at eight to-morrow, for we must start before nine.'

'I hope I did right,' said the governess, gently, as she and Miss Melburn went up the stairs together.

'There could be hardly a right or wrong in the matter,' was the indifferent reply. 'I was not anxious to go myself, but that you did not know.'

'Indeed I did not,' returned the other, earnestly. 'I only thought that it would please your father.'

'Just so; and so, you see, it did.'

With a hand-shake and a pleasant nod, as if to assure her that no ground for offence had been given, she left her at her door. Nevertheless, that Miss Melburn was annoyed, though it might not be with her, was clear to Miss Dart. As she sat by the fire in her cosy little room pondering on the day's events, it seemed to her that she had unconsciously given a good deal of annoyance. Her material surroundings were comfortable enough; much more so, indeed, than any of which she had had experience. But how far rather would she have been sitting in her own little back room in her aunt's lodgings! What sorry substitutes of genuine ease are all the appliances of luxury; how light in the balance weigh a hundred pretty speeches against one little word of love! Not, indeed—though there had been nothing to complain of in Miss Melburn's behaviour—that any one had been specially polite to her. No one except the Major had even been at the trouble to take any notice of her. He had, indeed, seemed to understand her position, and, in some sort, even her feelings; and he had certainly meant her well in advising her as he had done, though the result had been disappointing. For the present, it was clear that Mary Melburn was withholding her confidence from her. The social outlook was not only unpromising, but misty. She knew not where to tread without treading on somebody's toes. How eagerly she would have welcomed some hint of how matters stood, some friendly compass for her future guidance. If she had been in Miss Melburn's place and Miss Melburn in hers, surely, she thought, she would have made some effort to make her course less difficult to her. Common humanity almost seemed to demand it; but this common humanity was, perhaps, not to be found in such superior residences as Burrow Hall. Notwithstanding these desponding thoughts, the very difficulties of her position interested her. She had the power not only of 'getting out of herself,'

so much recommended to persons in trouble by those who themselves are free from it, but of regarding herself from the outside, which is another way of saying that, though perhaps unconsciously, Elizabeth Dart was a student of human nature.

CHAPTER VII.

THE START.

‘If you please, Miss, Miss Melburn’s compliments, and she sends you a riding-habit, which she hopes will fit you,’ were the first words that fell upon Miss Dart’s ears when she awoke in the morning. It brought home to her, with painful distinctness, all the events of the preceding day, which sleep had blotted out; it was not without a sharp twinge of trepidation that she remembered the unaccustomed thing she had promised to do to oblige the Squire. She gazed at her ordinary and familiar dress with the same sort of yearning with which Joan of Arc must have surveyed the armour which she was forbidden to don.

‘If you please, Miss,’ continued the maid, who was good-natured, simple, and, from deficiency of culture, had not the usual contempt of her class for governesses, ‘if you will ring when you are ready, I will come and help you on with it.’

This offer Miss Dart accepted with effusion. The garment alarmed her; the getting into it seemed to her like returning to long clothes. The Abigail not only performed her promise, but, when the habit was on, told her how Miss Mary was accustomed to hold it, so as to permit of pedestrianism. After one or two essays she looked much less like a swan on dry land than I have seen some young ladies similarly accoutred. As the Major had hinted, it was scarcely possible, indeed, for Elizabeth Dart to look awkward; she had too much good sense. Even the going downstairs to the breakfast-room was effected without mishap. She found the three gentlemen alone together, arrayed in sporting costume, with knee-breeches and top-boots, an attire she had never seen out of a circus: her own apparel, being familiar to their eye, fortunately courted no attention.

‘I see you have screwed your courage to the sticking-place, Miss Dart,’ was all the allusion the Squire made to it, as he looked up for a moment from his morning’s letters.

'I hope it will prove so,' she answered, laughingly; but the jest fell apparently upon deaf ears.

'Unless as a matter of practice,' murmured the Major, under cover of a drooping fire of envelope flap and newspaper cutting, 'you will find it useless to make jokes in this house. We're a very serious family.'

The observation, so far as it suggested that the miscarriage of her little pleasantry imputed dulness to her employer, was unwelcome to her; but, being human, she could not but be grateful to the person who had understood it.

'It was unbecoming in me to joke at all,' she answered, gravely.

'Of course,' he answered, mockingly. 'We should revere the Squire and his relations, and always keep our proper stations.'

'I wish you would not make such a noise with that paper, Jefferson,' exclaimed Mr. Melburn, irritably; 'it sets my teeth on edge.'

'That's only natural, since it's the Tory organ,' returned the Major, coolly.

'I hope Miss Mary is not, after all, going to give us the slip,' observed Mr. Winthrop, pulling out his watch.

'The slip? Why should she give us the slip?' inquired the Squire, frowning.

'A very appropriate metaphor for a coursing meeting,' put in the Major, quickly. 'So ho!' (imitating the cry of the sportsman who sees a hare sitting) 'here comes the pretty puss herself.'

The compliment, though well deserved—for a prettier creature than Miss Mary looked in her riding dress it would have been hard to imagine—did not seem to be appreciated by its object. Without so much as acknowledging the Major's presence, or that of Mr. Winthrop, who got up to greet her, she went straight up to the governess and held out her hand.

'I owe you an apology, Miss Dart, for being so late and lazy as to have suffered you to come down by yourself. I hope,' she added, in a lower tone, and glancing at the other's habit, 'that you have had no difficulties; if you had, however, you have surmounted them famously.'

She went up to her father, and, lifting her comely head on one side, received upon her cheek the hasty smear which formed the paternal kiss.

To Mr. Winthrop, waiting patiently glass in eye, she gave

her hand, but very coldly, and when he retained it somewhat beyond the usual limits, she utilised the interval to nod to her half-brother, ere sitting down before the tea-urn.

This little by-play was a revelation to Miss Dart. If Miss Mary had been a less skilful actress the governess would have known last night what as matters were, she had been by no means convinced of—namely, that Mr. Winthrop's attentions were unwelcome to the young lady, and that she had made her new friend's ignorance of horsemanship the excuse for evading his companionship at the coursing meeting. But the other had played her part so naturally that Miss Dart had supposed it quite possible that she had been standing in the way of her wishes, as it was evident she had been in those of the Squire.

This new knowledge melted her heart towards her pupil, since it showed that on her part the girl had something to forgive. Her coldness of the previous night was accounted for, if not excused. So thoroughly had Miss Dart's indignation evaporated that there was none left to take what would have now seemed to have been its proper direction—namely, that of the Major, to whose interference the unpleasantry which had taken place was clearly due. He, at least, could scarcely have been ignorant of his sister's feelings in the matter; but men, reasoned the governess—no, not reasoned, said to herself—think so little of these things; they are always slightly inclined to be selfish; and since her going to the coursing meeting would add to his own pleasure—

'I do believe the air of our downs has done you good already, Miss Dart,' observed Mary, breaking in on these reflections.

Either it or something else had certainly given the governess a very high colour, which the observation considerably intensified.

'I am sure that it is very wholesome,' she stammered, feebly.

'I wish we could bottle it, and sell it in London,' said the Squire, regretfully.

'For sleeping draughts,' murmured the Major, drily.

'Yes,' assented Mr. Winthrop; 'the downs' air is capital for that—especially after coursing. It is the most admirable sport in the world, Miss Dart, as Miss Melburn here will tell you.'

'I am sure she will think it a very pretty sight,' said Mary, indifferently.

‘There is no objection to it either,’ continued Mr. Winthrop, volubly, ‘such as women—I mean ladies—make to pigeon-shooting; there is no cruelty to animals, and so on: a most innocent pleasure, I do assure you. Ask any one who has ever tried it.’

‘The hare, for example,’ observed the Major.

In spite of her efforts, Miss Dart could not restrain a smile. It was all very well for the Major, who, under cover of his great blonde moustache, retained the gravity of a Judge; but it was very wrong of him, and hard on her. Yet, somehow, she could not be so angry with him as she wanted to be. The Squire, however, was under no such restraint.

‘Well, sir, and what of that?’ he said, turning sharply on his son. ‘Has not man been given the fruits of the earth—I mean the beasts of the field—for his sustenance and enjoyment?’

‘Just so,’ said Mr. Winthrop, assentingly; ‘and, as everybody knows, “there is no hare so tender as a coursed hare.”’

It was no doubt by accident, but here the Major’s elbow, trembling with suppressed merriment, touched that of his fair neighbour. Between her sense of humour and her sense of what was becoming, poor Miss Dart could scarcely permit herself to breathe. Fortunately, at that moment the craunch of horses’ hoofs upon the ground drew general attention to the windows, through which could be seen the grooms and helpers leading the five horses, two of which, of course, had side-saddles.

‘That is your nag, Miss Dart—old Seaman,’ said the Squire, regarding the animals critically through his double eyeglass; then he threw up a window and began talking to the groom about some animal not present, who had been ‘fired,’ in such a tender, regretful voice that one would have thought he had been speaking of one of his wheat-ricks.

‘Which horse did your father say was mine?’ inquired the governess of Miss Mary, in tones which she in vain endeavoured to render indifferent.

‘The brown one. You must not mind his being large; he is very docile.’

‘That is what is said of elephants, Mary,’ said the Major, remonstratingly.

'I wish it was an elephant,' thought poor Miss Dart to herself, 'then it would have a howdah on it instead of that thing.' And, indeed, it cannot be denied that to a neophyte a side-saddle is not a symbol of security.

Miss Mary had already assured her friend that her mother was too ill to see her that morning till after her return, but she herself went to take leave of her. There were certain packets containing lunch to be distributed to each member of the party, and the gentlemen had to provide themselves with cigars; so that it was twenty minutes or so before they were all assembled on the carriage-drive in front of the house and ready for the start.

Mr. Winthrop stepped briskly forward to assist Miss Mary to her horse, but losing his eyeglass in the attempt, as usual, and fumbling to find it, she beckoned in the meantime to the groom, who, with his hand under her foot, landed her deftly in her seat on the instant. The Major stood in waiting to render the same service to Miss Dart, but perceiving the piteous look she cast from him to her gigantic steed—like a landsman who sees a mere rope thrown out to him to help him up a ship's side—led the animal at once to an old mounting-stone, which, like some altar erected to the equine race, stood on one side of the entrance-steps, and therefrom she transferred herself to the saddle without difficulty. For this thoughtful attention she felt truly grateful, and smiled her thanks on him, while he showed her how to hold her whip and reins.

'The pommel will be a great temptation, but you must avoid it,' he said, gravely. 'Riding on horseback is like life itself: you must depend on yourself, and not on any extraneous aids.'

'But if he begins to trot?' suggested poor Miss Dart, feeling as if she was on a mountain of the volcanic sort, the least movement of which would be fatal.

'He never trots, it shakes his fat sides too much,' was the encouraging rejoinder; 'and when he canters it is like a rocking-chair—danger there is none. But be assured I shall never leave your side till you have lost all fear of it.'

As he turned to mount his own champing and impatient steed, he raised his eyes to an upper window and lifted his hat, while at the same time a demure look, almost mocking by contrast with that which he had just been wearing, came over his features. Miss Dart followed his gaze, and beheld Mrs.

Melburn, in a morning gown, looking fixedly at her. On her face, too, was an expression she could not understand. It was one of pain and deep distress. Upon seeing that she was observed, however, she bowed and waved her hand with cold politeness. Before the governess could return her salute, the cortège began to move, and with it the mountain on which she sat. She had read, of course, of the motion of the earth, and had accepted it with other scientific theories, but it was her first experience of the actual fact.

CHAPTER VIII.

COURSING.

THE coursing meetings of to-day wear a strong resemblance to those of the racecourse. The ratio in which sport and gain were wont to be mixed has become inverted, the strife is less for honour than for rewards; even the reward is not what it was, but takes the form of hard cash; and over 'the pleasant fields and farms,' where the 'fine old English gentleman' was wont to follow his favourite pastime, are now everywhere—mingled with the other cloven hoofs—the footprints of the members of the betting ring. But even still, in out-of-the-way spots upon the windy hills, or in sheltered hollows of the down lands, there are meetings of the old kind, attended by squires and farmers only, and sometimes by fair equestrians.

The downs—which, save for a few high-placed fir clumps, or a patch of furze taller than common, are free from all obstruction to the view—seem made for such a sport. The road to Clapper's Down was uphill all the way—for which the governess thanked her stars, since it necessitated a footpace; they climbed and climbed up the deep chalk road, till at last they reached the summit of a great green plateau which, unadorned itself by Nature's hand, looked down upon the varied beauties of three counties—hamlets, clustered round their grey-towered churches; homesteads, with their compact farmyards and forests of ricks about them; the dull blue river, glinting coldly through the as yet unclothed trees, and winding along the low meadowlands, till it hid itself in some ancient town: here and there, far off, the smoke of a railway train, but not the train itself; nothing looked in

motion, for the distance lent rest as well as enchantment to the view. The many-horsed waggons upon the open road seemed stationary, as also the nearer flocks of sheep to the right hand and to the left, though the clear notes of their bells told a different tale.

Suddenly, in the hollow of the hill, the party from the Hall came upon a goodly sight: a body of some fifty men on horseback, preceded by a vanguard of a dozen more scattered at some distance apart, like skirmishers—the voluntary beaters for the game.

‘I see a red coat!’ exclaimed Miss Dart, whom the unaccustomed air, and the novelty of the ride and of all the objects about her, had greatly excited: since Seaman still plodded soberly on his way, her apprehensions had vanished, and enjoyment had taken their place. ‘I thought that only fox-hunters wore red coats.’

‘Quite right,’ said the Major, who was riding, as he had promised, at her bridle-rein: ‘that is the judge of the coursing; and between the two parties of horsemen in the turnip-field, you see another man in red on foot—that is the slipper. He holds the couple of greyhounds that are next to run in his leash, within which is a string—See, though we are a little late, we are yet in time, like tardy arrivals at a dinner-party—for the first course. They have found a hare. Here she comes down the hill, straight for that fir plantation just below us. Now the dogs have the sight, look how they strain, and drag the slipper with them!’

Through the clear air was heard the judge’s mandate. ‘Go’; and the greyhounds, fawn and white, the very types of speed and grace, bound forward simultaneously, taking three yards of ground for poor puss’s two. There is no doubt that they will soon come up with her—but as to catching her, see how she threw them out by that sharp turn, and scuds away up the hill—that is a very different matter. Down hill, indeed, which is the way she must take, however indirectly, she has no chance; the dogs recover their lost ground, gain on her, overtake her, arch their long backs in readiness to spring, when, with another still sharper turn, like that of the wrist of a swordsman, she flies away again with her ears laid level with her back and leaves her baffled foes thirty yards behind her. It is a species of circular sailing, which sooner or later must tire puss out; but, in the meanwhile, she approaches nearer and nearer to the plantation which is her sanctuary

from the jaws of death. The greyhounds appear to be aware of this, and this time they come up with her, turn her, force her down hill as it were, before her time; the fawn dog, who is leading, with outstretched neck makes a fierce grab at her, and for his pains gets a mouthful of fur, but puss herself is through the fence and safe; not without hopes of dewy mornings yet to come next spring, and hours of snoozing in her cosy form through wintry noons.

‘Confound the beast!’ exclaimed the Major, vehemently.

‘What!’ cried Miss Dart, with indignation—her heart had been beating throughout the whole proceeding almost as fast as the hare’s—‘you don’t mean to say you are sorry she has escaped?’

‘Oh, no, no, no,’ he answered emphatically; then, after a moment’s hesitation, he added, ‘I am afraid I was not thinking of poor puss at all; the white dog belongs to us, you see, and has lost the course.’

‘But neither of them caught the hare,’ she urged.

‘Quite true; but the fawn dog turned her twice to the other’s once, and stuck to her all along, though he tripped at last.’

Then he explained to her how ‘a turn’ is when the hare swerves from her course, and ‘a wrench’ when she swerves still more sharply from it, and that ‘a trip’ is when a dog seizes the hare and fails to kill it.

She listened with an interest that amazed him; the spectacle of a female nature easily roused to enthusiasm and greedy for things new and strange was a novelty to him, and encouraged him to pursue a topic which, truth to say, he cared little about.

‘The race is by no means to the swift in these matters,’ he continued, smiling. ‘The judge, yonder, has to take all the circumstances of the case into account: whether the hare bends round towards one dog or the other; or whether one fails to catch sight of pussy at the first glance, and therefore has a bad start. Nothing escapes his consideration.’

‘That is not so in human life,’ observed Miss Dart, gravely.

‘True; there is no one to handicap *us* in the struggle for existence.’ He looked at her very curiously for a moment, but she did not observe it; her gaze was fixed upon the scene before her; it seemed as though she had made the reflection to herself without expectation of any rejoinder; perhaps the

form in which he had couched his reply had been unintelligible to her, but her inattention piqued him.

‘I suppose, Miss Dart, you consider that, being a soldier, I am incapable of philosophic reflections, or even of sympathy.’

‘No, Major Melburn, certainly not *that*,’ she answered, hurriedly, and with a faint flush. ‘It did strike me, however, that we must needs regard the matter you spoke of from very different standpoints. To you, if the world does not seem the best possible of all worlds, it nevertheless shows its sunny side. It must strike you that the doctrine of compensation—of redressing the balance—is a somewhat superfluous theory; while to me—well, I don’t complain; but my lines have fallen in less pleasant places.’

‘And yet it is said,’ he answered in low tones, ‘that “lightly comes the world to those who are cast in gentle mould.”’

‘I am afraid I can take very little comfort from that circumstance, even if it were fact,’ she answered, smiling, but with a certain severity too. ‘I am not made of sugar-plums, I do assure you.’

‘I never supposed you were,’ he answered gently. ‘I know many young ladies who are composed of that material, and you are not in the least like them.—This is a pretty sight, is it not?’

They had now almost joined the company upon the opposite hill. There had been another course, and puss had again reached the plantation in safety, round which, ‘though lost to sight to memory dear,’ her baffled pursuers were vainly straining their keen eyes for her. The dogs that had not yet run were standing about in pairs, clothed (as if they had been *Italian* greyhounds) in parti-coloured garments, with only their legs and heads exposed to view, like so many miniature racehorses. Upon glossy hunters, with arching heads and champing mouths, or upon stout, sturdy cobs, rode the gentry and yeomen of Downshire—a mounted troop such as no other land could probably furnish, with here and there a grotesque exception, such as some case of obesity upon a Shetland pony, or a more independent than wealthy sportsman perched on the tottering hind legs of a Jerusalem pony. There were also half-a-dozen of dear John Leech’s little boys upon the backs of infinitesimal ponies, all mane and tail. Here, too, rode the stewards of the meeting, with red and white ribbons at their button-holes, and with choice expressions in their mouths for

folk who *would* ride over the untried ground, and start the hare when there were no dogs to follow her ; curious it was to mark the nice gradations of treatment to which these trespassers were subjected ; how the transgressing squire was expostulated with, and the erring yeoman sworn at, and the simple smock-frocked pedestrian fairly horsewhipped back into his proper place. Besides these, there were the camp-followers—heterogeneous vehicles, which could be only described, with charity, generically as ‘ four-wheelers ’ ; a plague of gigs, numerous as the flies of Egypt, and of every colour in the rainbow ; dog-carts, literally dog-carts, which had carried the various candidates for the stakes from their distant kennels, or from railway stations ; and a covered cart, ordinarily used by some village carrier, but filled on this occasion with creature comforts, and resembling a peripatetic public-house. The spectacle would have been interesting and exciting to almost any one, but to Elizabeth Dart it was entrancing, for it was a new page of human nature.

‘ So ho ! ’ cries a sharp-eyed farmer ; ‘ there she lies under the grey grass yonder.’ How close she sits, well knowing what all this rout has come about, and determined not to stir a leg till she is whipped up. Fatal mistake, puss, surely, to lose the precious moments while thy canine enemies are scores of yards away, and the slipper does not even know of thy existence ! This time it is resolved that all escape to the plantation should be cut off. The horsemen ride off to left and right and make a lane, through which she must needs run to the downs. Push forward, boys, upon your pigmy steeds to the front ; for you, too, will need all the start you can get.

Up comes the red judge upon a fresh horse, and the red slipper (poor fellow !), on the same pair of feet ; some good soul, however, presently lends him a horse to mount the hill. There is a crack of a hunting-whip, and off starts a long-legged hare straight for the down land—away go the fleet dogs, and away the regiment of miscellaneous cavalry, the elephantine Seaman and his fair burden—to whom he imparts the equable motion of a rocking-horse—among them, and away the four-wheels, and the gigs, and the peripatetic public-house. These last work up the least perpendicular hill, which happens to be ploughed land, like so many teams.

The stout hare holds her own ; and when the horsemen, who have been hanging on the steep like flies on a window-pane, reach the summit, the dogs and she are a mile away.

Ladies who ride to hounds are, as a rule, no more enthusiastic than are male sportsmen; they are diffuse about dogs and horses and the details of the chase, but they feel little excitement in it save of the physical kind; they enjoy the excursion but feel nothing of the poetry of motion it affords, beside which that of the ball-room sinks into insignificance. With Elizabeth Dart it was different, she seemed to be carried out of herself into another world; the rush of the wind, the beat of her horse's feet upon the springy turf, was music to her: for the moment she experienced supreme enjoyment, and her face showed it.

'It is like champagne, is it not?' exclaimed the Major, as he galloped by her side.

'I don't know,' she answered, smiling; 'I never tasted champagne.'

The Major stared at her in undisguised amazement: a woman who had never tasted champagne was a phenomenon to him—nay, an anomaly. A child who had never tasted sugar would have astonished him less, though, to be sure, he knew little about children. In a general way, simplicity had no charms for him; but in this case it had a certain piquancy. He had the sense to admire the frankness of a reply which was also a confession; for how poor he reflected must have been the surroundings, and how humble the bringing up, of one who had attained maturity, without an experience so ordinary and matter of course!

At this moment a circumstance occurred which rather disenchanted our heroine, with respect to coursing: the hare, which had been nearing the sanctuary—a fir-grove—in the usual manner, in one of her turns—not good enough alas! to deserve another—got caught in the air by one of the dogs, and uttered a horrible cry of torture. Miss Dart's hands dropped the reins and flew up to her ears.

'How can you be so rash!' cried the Major. 'If I had not been beside you'—for his hand had seized her bridle at once—'you might have broken your neck!'

His apprehensions were probably exaggerated, since Sea-man was an animal as little given to stumbling as to running away; but she could not but acknowledge his solicitude.

'I did not know our pleasure was to be purchased at such a price,' she answered. Her pupil's face, too, though she must have been used to such incidents, wore a look of distress.

'Cried like a child, didn't she, Miss Mary?' observed Mr. Winthrop, with the air of one who hits upon an appropriate metaphor. Her eyes spoke for her, but the girl made no reply; a shudder ran through her frame. Perhaps she was not thinking solely of the poor hare.

'It was a shocking sight,' she murmured.

'It is, at all events, what all hares come to unless they're shot,' he answered; and then added, with some irritation, 'I think, too, that you might have remembered that it was my dog.'

'That disposes of the tie, does it not?' exclaimed the Squire, riding up. 'Mary, you should congratulate Winthrop.'

'I am glad that Mr. Winthrop has won the stakes,' she answered, mechanically. Then, turning to the governess, she exclaimed, 'I am sure I ought to congratulate you, too, Miss Dart. How capitally you have got on with Seaman!'

'And *kept* on,' put in Mr. Winthrop. 'That's rather good, Jefferson, eh?' and he prodded his friend humorously with the crop of his whip.

'I think it very good,' replied the Major; 'that is,' he added, dropping his voice so that Miss Dart alone could hear, 'for *you*.'

'We must drink Winthrop's health at dinner to-night,' exclaimed Mr. Melburn, exultingly.

'Yes, and in champagne,' said the Major.

The Squire made a wry face; there were reasons why he was inclined to be hospitable to his guest, but at the same time there are limits to hospitality.

As they turned their horses homeward, 'Did you see how the Governor's face fell, Miss Dart,' asked the Major, 'when I suggested his giving us champagne? He is uncommonly chary of his fizz.'

'Then I think it was very wrong of you to suggest it,' she said, with severity, for she felt that it was also very wrong of him to make her the recipient of such information. 'If you knew that it would annoy your father, why did you do it?'

'Well, if you really wish to know the reason,' he answered, with a smile, 'it was on your account; since you told me just now that you had never tasted champagne, I was determined that you should have an early opportunity of doing so.'

‘Really, Major Melburn, you must have a poor opinion of me,’ she answered, stiffly, ‘to suppose that I entertain any such ambition. I have no more curiosity in the way of wine than of tobacco.’

‘Well, I have seen some very distinguished young women, with handles to their names, too, for whom even tobacco has had charms.’

‘I neither envy them their taste nor their handles to their names,’ was the chilling rejoinder.

‘Now don’t be angry with me,’ said the Major, penitently. ‘I know you are quite another and very superior sort of person to them, but you did say the other evening—I mean yesterday, but somehow or other I seem to have known you so much longer—that you thought it was a good thing to have some experience of everything, big and little, so long as it was not harmful, and I thought that even champagne was not too small a thing to be left out of the category. I am awfully sorry if I have offended you.’

‘You have not offended me, Major Melburn.’

‘Nay, but it is clear I have,’ he answered, comically. ‘I am not like Winthrop, yonder, who never knows when he has put his foot in it; at all events, be as good as to say you forgive me.’

‘Very well, Major Melburn, I forgive you.’

She looked up, and noticed Miss Mary’s eyes regarding her with the same strange expression she had noticed in Mrs. Melburn’s face when she had started from the hall that morning. There was pity in it as well as pain, she felt, but its meaning, though her wits were keen to mark the thoughts of others, was hidden from her. The physiognomists may boast as they please, but the human countenance is not, after all, so easy to translate as a Greek play with a crib.

CHAPTER IX.

CONFIDENCE.

MISS DART had just exchanged her habit, or rather Miss Melburn’s, for her ordinary attire, when that young lady knocked at her door. ‘Mamma would like to see you if quite convenient,’ she said, ‘before you go downstairs.’ Her voice was

very gentle, but it was not cordial; and it was for cordiality that the governess yearned. Her nature was anything but parasitical, it did not require anything to cling to; it could live, 'suffer,' and even 'be strong,' without sympathy, but it could not be happy without it. There are some plants the roots of which, if they find themselves in arid soil, will elongate and stretch in all directions for water, without which they cannot flourish, though they can exist. Elizabeth Dart was one of them. She had no fear of being treated unkindly at Burrow Hall, nor even with neglect (though neglect she could have borne); but she was keenly conscious that she had failed as yet in gaining the confidence of her pupil. It was this, above all things, when she had accepted her present situation, that she had made up her mind to secure; and to know that she had failed filled her with discouragement. She had had, as pupil-teacher in a large school, a considerable experience of girls, and whenever she had tried to make one of them her friend, had succeeded. With others she had not tried, not because she felt the labour would have been thrown away, for she had too strong a sense of duty to spare herself, but because her intuition informed her that the thing was impossible.

In the case of Mary Melburn she felt no such conviction and that circumstance distressed her the more. Had the girl been cold and cross, grudging, insolent, or artificial, friendship would have been out of the question, and there would have been nothing for it but to earn her salary by unsweetened toil, as had happened to hundreds in her position; but notwithstanding some shortcomings, or what had seemed to be such, in Mary Melburn's behaviour to her, she was convinced that she had a good disposition and all the capabilities for friendship. It was hard, therefore, that the door of mutual understanding was closed between them, and the key hidden from her, or out of reach. Of Mrs. Melburn, on the other hand, she had no such good opinion. She had a suspicion that that lady, if not an hypochondriac, was not so ill as she affected to be, while she claimed all the privileges of a confirmed invalid. That this, at all events, was the opinion of others seemed certain, or surely some notice would have been taken of her condition by the male members of her family. Even their guest, to whom she was probably well known, had not given himself the trouble, as she had noticed, to inquire after her health that morning. It was, therefore, with no enviable

feelings that Elizabeth Dart found herself for the second time in her employer's boudoir.

Mrs. Melburn, as before, was on the sofa, but fully attired ; indeed, from her appearance, the governess judged, and indeed rightly, that she intended to present herself that evening at the dinner-table below-stairs. Her dress became her admirably, and heightened her undeniable charms ; but, on the other hand, it increased the delicacy of her appearance—as virgin white and wreaths of flowers, with which reverent hands would fain decorate the youthful dead, only the more proclaim mortality. As Miss Dart looked at her, she reproached herself with having imputed the pretence of illness to one so manifestly weak and frail. There was firmness, if not vigour, however, in the calm clear tones in which Mrs. Melburn saluted her, and immediately afterwards addressed her daughter.

‘I wish, Mary, to say a few words to Miss Dart alone, or rather in Dr. Dalling’s presence only.’

The governess followed the direction of her eyes and perceived, as Mary withdrew, that there was still a third person in the room. A man of gigantic stature was standing in the shadow of the window-curtain, with his hands behind him, regarding her with great intentness. He inclined three feet or so of his frame as his name was mentioned, but remained silent. The afternoon light fell full upon herself and revealed every feature. She felt at once that this gentleman’s opinion would presently be passed on her in a non-professional sense ; that she had been sent for on approval, or what was quite as likely to prove the reverse. It was borne in upon her quick intelligence that the unfavourable judgment which her employer had already formed of her was to be confirmed, or not, according to the view which the family physician might take of her. It would be something much more serious than inconvenience, if she were thus to lose her first situation, and so immediately, but this consideration in no way affected her behaviour or the course of conduct she intended to pursue ; for, with all her cleverness, she was incapable of playing a part that was not her own. As she stood beside her employer’s couch, with her head slightly thrown back and a quiet air of respect, that was also self-respect, in her bright, clear eyes, she might have realised, if not altogether in Wordsworthian fashion, a poet’s idea of ‘Resolution and Independence.’

‘I have sent for you, Miss Dart,’ said the invalid, in low

but very distinct tones, 'in consequence of a certain change of circumstances which affects us both.'

Here she paused ; and the governess inclined her head with unchanged face, but with a heavier heart. From this exordium she judged that her dismissal had been decided on, and was already picturing to herself Aunt Jane's distressful face, and the re-commencement of old troubles known but to the poor, who only ask leave to work, and yet find it so difficult to obtain permission.

'My state of health, as Dr. Dalling informs me to-day, is even less satisfactory than he had supposed it to be, and will, therefore, in all probability, necessitate my going abroad at a still earlier date. My daughter's departure for Casterton will therefore be proportionately hastened ; in fact, it may take place immediately, and the question is, whether you are qualified not only to fill the post of her friend and companion, but also, in some measure, to take charge of her in my place ?' She paused ; but as it was clear she did so from physical causes—the effort of speaking with such gravity and distinctness—the other held her peace.

'You are very young,' she continued—'a circumstance with which you may justly say I was already acquainted ; but from the excellent certificates——'

'Testimonials,' suggested a voice from the window-curtain, surprisingly soft and gentle to emanate from so huge a frame ; 'it is we doctors who grant certificates, and—unlike this young lady's—always of disability.'

'I beg your pardon, Miss Dart,' resumed Mrs. Melburn, with an obvious increase of kindliness in her tone. 'I was about to remark that from the testimonials I had received with you, I had been led to imagine that I should find in you not only an agreeable and elevating associate for my daughter, but one somewhat more staid and judicious—not that an old head upon young shoulders is to be expected.'

There was another gentle murmur from the curtain.

'Or even, as Dr. Dalling suggests, "to be desired" ; but in this respect I have been a little disappointed.'

'I am very sorry,' said the governess, gently, 'and the more so since, not being conscious of any shortcoming in the matter you mention, I scarcely know how to guard against the repetition of my offence.'

'There is no offence, Miss Dart,' answered Mrs. Melburn, hastily. 'Things have turned out a little unfortunately, that

is all—accidents will happen’—here she hesitated, it was plain that embarrassment had caused her to wander into unaccustomed platitude.

‘Of course they will,’ put in the friendly voice. ‘If accidents did not happen, what would become of the doctors? If I may say a word, Miss Dart, as a very old friend of Mrs. Melburn’s, and one whom she is so good as to put some faith in as an adviser, I would venture to suggest that from no fault of your own you have not thoroughly comprehended her position. Unhappily, through illness—and—and—other causes, she is unable to exercise that supervision over her daughter which, as a mother, she would wish to use, and her duties in this respect will fall upon your shoulders. I need scarcely tell you, for even from the little you have seen of her you must needs have arrived at that conclusion yourself, that Miss Mary wants no “looking after” in the conventional sense; she does not require control or even guidance; but she does stand in need of sympathy and a certain guardianship such as might be looked for in an elder sister.’

‘An undivided attention,’ observed Mrs. Melburn, with the air of a person who, having been at a loss for the right word to use upon an important occasion, has found it at last.

The governess flushed to her forehead.

‘Mrs. Melburn is very far from imputing any neglect to you, Miss Dart,’ went on the friendly voice; ‘but, in the necessary absence of her mother, or, indeed, of any female friend, Miss Mary finds herself in some degree isolated; her position demands not only an adviser, but I may say a protector.’

Mrs. Melburn nodded her head in approbation and adhesion.

‘You would doubtless reply,’ continued the doctor, ‘if circumstances permitted you to speak plainly upon so delicate a matter, that you can scarcely understand how a young lady in her father’s house can be so placed; but, nevertheless, such is the case. It is plain, therefore, that your responsibility will be the greater when—as will happen almost immediately—she leaves that house. In telling you this much, I need not say, Miss Dart, that Mrs. Melburn is placing the greatest confidence in you, which she feels sure you will not abuse.’

If the governess could have caught sight of her employer’s face, it must needs have caused her to accept this last statement with what journalists term ‘some reserve’; for it was aghest with terror and dismay. Her own eyes, however, were

cast upon the ground; her heart was touched by the doctor's simple and manly appeal; she felt full of tenderness, pity, and gratitude—all quickened by a vague sense of self-reproach.

'I am deeply sensible,' she replied, 'Dr. Dalling, of the frankness with which, through your mouth, Mrs. Melburn has been so good as to treat me. It shall be my earnest endeavour henceforth to prove myself worthy of her confidence.'

'I was certain of it from the first,' observed the doctor, laconically.

'You are always right,' murmured Mrs. Melburn, unconscious that that naïve rejoinder implied a previous disagreement on the point.

Once more she addressed herself to the governess, but in a much more assured and natural tone, like one who feels that the ground is cleared of certain obstacles that might have appeared insurmountable.

'When you are at Casterton, Miss Dart, which you soon will be, you will remember, please, that my daughter is solely in your charge; and that no matter what pressure may be put upon you, you have my authority for prohibiting——'

'I would scarcely say prohibiting, Mrs. Melburn,' interposed the doctor, gently; 'it suggests a necessity which surely can hardly arise.'

'I wish I could feel that,' answered the invalid, drily. 'Let me say, then, generally, Miss Dart, that you have my authority for protecting my daughter from all attentions that may be distasteful to her.'

Miss Dart bowed her head in respectful assent. She could not doubt but that the person she was thus exhorted to keep at arm's length—and further—was Mr. Winthrop. The imposition of such a task was a matter of much significance, for it was plain that, in so doing, her employer was not only placing a great responsibility in her hands, but also *herself* in her hands. She was taking it for granted that the governess would be henceforth not only her friend but her ally. So confident was she that she would not prove traitress, that she had, as it were, intrusted her with the key of the citadel. Nothing could, so far, be more flattering. On the other hand, Miss Dart could not conceal from herself that Mrs. Melburn had not had much choice in the matter. Since her departure was so immediate, it was scarcely possible for her to make other arrangements—to procure a new governess, for example. It was also clear that she had not taken so important a step

without seeking the advice of another ; or, indeed, what seemed quite as likely, that other might have persuaded her to take it. But for the interposition of that favouring and gentle voice, like an Eolian harp placed in the window, it even seemed possible that the interview might have had a different ending. The main business once concluded, however, everything else went fair and free, like a ship before the wind.

‘ You will find my sister-in-law, Mrs. Meyrick, most kind. Her mode of life is very quiet ; but her little cottage is a Home,’ continued Mrs. Melburn, after a pause. Was it fancy, thought the governess, or did she detect a tinge of bitterness in that last sentence ? Did there lurk in it an involuntary comparison between Mrs. Meyrick’s humble residence and Burrow Hall ? If it was so, surely this poor lady, whatever might be her faults, was to be pitied. It is not only those who shiver on our inhospitable doorsteps in the winter nights who are the homeless.

‘ I don’t think there is anything more to be said,’ observed Mrs. Melburn, with a glance at her counsel.

‘ Certainly not,’ said the doctor, decisively ; and as the governess left the room he waved his hand to her, with a look of approbation and encouragement.

CHAPTER X.

‘ THE BOY.’

WHEN, an hour or so afterwards, Miss Dart descended into the drawing-room, she found the master of the house and the Major attired for dinner, and Dr. Dalling hat in hand. All three had the air of being engaged in grave conversation. She would have retired hastily, but Mr. Melburn called her back.

‘ We are discussing no secrets,’ he exclaimed, in sharp and petulant tones ; ‘ pray come in, Miss Dart—— Then you really won’t stop and dine with us, doctor ? ’

‘ Thank you, no—not to-day,’ was the quiet reply.

The invitation, or the repetition of it, as it struck the new comer, was not very pressing, and the rejection of it un-

necessarily positive. As the doctor left the room, he bowed to the governess with stately courtesy, very different from his style of farewell above-stairs.

'By-the-bye, I forgot you two have not been introduced to one another,' said the Squire.

'Nevertheless, I have had the pleasure of seeing Miss Dart before.'

'Just so—I forgot. We had the first sight of her through the window, had we not?' returned Mr. Melburn, with a forced laugh.

To the governess this explanation was unintelligible, but what she well understood was that the doctor on his part did not wish to claim further acquaintance with her; a circumstance which corroborated her suspicion that the family at Burrow Hall were divided into two parties, and that she had already been enlisted by one of them.

'I don't believe half that fellow said,' observed the Squire, vehemently, as soon as the door had closed behind the doctor.

It was an observation injudicious indeed for him to have made before an almost entire stranger; but when the master of Burrow Hall was 'put out,' it was not in his nature to be reticent. The Major stole a glance, half horrified, half humorous, at Miss Dart, as he replied respectfully: 'At all events, sir, you have done the right thing. It was impossible, after the expression of an opinion so decided, and coming from such a quarter, for you to have arrived at any other conclusion.'

'It's all very well for you to take it so philosophically,' returned the Squire, snappishly; 'but supposing I was to say, "Well, I can't go myself, but I will send Jefferson to take care of you."'

'In that case,' was the dry rejoinder, 'I think it just possible, sir, as in the case of the cheap sherry recommended for the gout, that Mrs. Melburn would reply: "Rather than take that prescription, I prefer to remain ill, and at home."'

At this moment Mrs. Melburn, leaning on her daughter's arm, entered the room; the Squire stepped forward with outstretched hand as if to greet some invited guest. 'Is not this rather rash, considering what the doctor has been telling me, my dear?' he observed, in cold remonstrance.

'He gave me his permission,' she answered; 'and since it seems my stay at home is to be so limited, I could not

resist taking advantage of it—— Thank you, I feel no worse.'

The last sentence was addressed to the Major, in reply to some murmured inquiry about her health, and was delivered in icy tones. As she was about to take her seat, Mr. Winthrop entered. Her presence evidently took him by surprise; he cast a hurried glance of dismay at the Major, met by an amused smile, and, dropping his glass, expressed confusedly his pleasure at seeing his hostess below-stairs.

'I had feared,' he said, 'from the accounts Mr. Melburn gave me, that I was not to see you during my present visit.'

'As I am going away so soon, I could not bring myself to pass my evenings in separation from my daughter any more,' she said.

'That is not a very complimentary remark as regards the rest of us,' observed the Squire, with frowning brow.

'I think, under the circumstances, a very natural one, my dear; and as you yourself are to be the companion of my journey, you have no cause to complain of it.'

'That's one for Winthrop and me, and you, Miss Dart,' returned the Major, in low tones. 'I know no one who can "put in her left" more neatly than my excellent step-mother.'

If Mrs. Melburn's air was not aggressive, it was indeed, for an invalid, decidedly combative. With her arm still resting on that of her daughter, she seemed to repel Mr. Winthrop's polite advances like a hen who shelters a chicken under its wing.

'Come,' she said, as dinner was announced, 'I must leave you gentlemen to divide Miss Dart, and exercise the privilege of an invalid by choosing my own partner.'

She was on her way to the dining-room with Miss Mary before Mr. Winthrop could oppose a word of remonstrance. He bit his lip and looked exceedingly annoyed; but the Squire stepped up to him and, whispering in his ear something that smoothed his brow, linked his arm in his and led him briskly out.

There was nothing for it but for Miss Dart to take the Major's arm, which he offered in the most natural way, and without the least touch of ceremony.

'Ours is a genial family, is it not?' he said. 'It is said to be very old, and I have a theory that it began in the glacial period, and has never quite got rid of that atmosphere.'

'You should not speak of your family like that to me,' replied the governess, severely; 'it is not right.'

'I am so sorry,' he answered penitently; 'you scold me so often that I seem to be always forgetting myself. Yet, if you knew the temptation it is to be natural when one has found a human being who can really sympathise with one——'

'But I do not sympathise with you, when——'

'Pray do not say that,' put in the Major, pleadingly; then, with a rapid change of voice, he added, 'Come, there are the long glasses which mark the presence of the Boy.'

The governess looked puzzled, as well she might.

'I say, Winthrop,' he continued, 'here's a young lady who does not know that "the Boy" means champagne.'

'Impossible!' replied that gentleman, with an air of amazement. 'What do you think of that, Miss Melburn?'

'I can only say that, until this moment, I shared Miss Dart's ignorance,' was the quiet reply.

'Good Heavens!' ejaculated Mr. Winthrop. There was so considerable a mixture of contempt in the tone, that the Squire was nettled on his own account.

'You town gentlemen must excuse our country simplicity,' he said; 'but we are not in the way of hearing London slang.'

'What, sir! do you mean to say *you* didn't know it?' exclaimed Mr. Winthrop, unconscious of reproof. 'Think of that, Jefferson! Thank you, no—no sherry'—to the butler—'when I see champagne, I am a one-wine man. I drink it right through, after dinner and all.'

The Squire groaned.

'What's the matter, sir?' inquired Mr. Winthrop, whom the very sight of his favourite and accustomed liquor seemed to inspire with eloquence.

'I think I felt a twinge of the gout,' replied his host, apologetically.

'Then taste "the Boy"—he'll bring it out for you. Gout carries away everything.'

'Thank you, I don't want it to carry *me* away,' was the curt rejoinder. The host had brought up two bottles from his hoarded store, but in fervent expectation that one would suffice. Should his guest carry out his full intentions, it was obvious this expectation would not be realised if he took any champagne himself. He was by no means penurious or inhospitable, but he had been brought up in an old-fashioned school, and looked upon champagne as a luxury.

'It is as good as a play, and I see you are enjoying it,' murmured the Major to his neighbour.

'I really do not know what you mean,' replied Miss Dart, it must be confessed a little mendaciously; for her sense of humour had compelled her to take in and appreciate the whole situation.

'I suppose Dr. Dalling would veto your taking ever such a little glass, my dear?' observed the Squire to his wife.

'It has no temptation for me,' she answered quietly.

'Ah! that means it's not iced,' exclaimed Mr. Winthrop, with an air of conviction. 'I've noticed that all women—I mean ladies—like their champagne iced. That's a mistake when it's really good. Now, so far as I have gone with it—for one can seldom pronounce with certainty upon the first taste—this is very good champagne, Jefferson.'

'I rather think it is,' replied the Squire, drily. 'Though it is not, in my opinion, a wine to go well with soup and fish.'

'My dear sir, good wine goes well with everything, only better with some things than with others. Some say champagne should never be drunk with the sweets. That's rubbish: the French always do it, and they ought, I suppose, to know.'

'I hate the French,' exclaimed the Squire, parenthetically.

'So do I,' continued Mr. Winthrop; 'they speak such a vile language. Not so bad as German, though. That reminds me, Mrs. Melburn, that you are going to Germany in a day or two.' He raised his glass and looked towards her. 'I hope you will have a good time.'

As addressed to a person seriously, if not hopelessly ill, and going abroad for her health, the aspiration was hardly an appropriate one. Mrs. Melburn, however, acknowledged it by a frigid bow.

'Miss Mary, will you do me the honour of taking a glass of champagne with me?' inquired the guest.

'She never takes champagne,' put in the Squire, hastily. 'She is too much afraid of our hereditary enemy.'

Mr. Winthrop stared at the speaker through his eye-glass. 'That's beyond me,' he said: 'it sounds like something from the catechism.'

'Probably the Mohammedan catechism, which forbids the juice of the grape,' observed the Major. 'Here's another young lady with scruples. Mrs. Melburn, pray use your influence with Miss Dart to induce her to take a little champagne.'

'If you like it, I hope you will take some,' said the hostess, addressing the governess with a smile.

'But she doesn't know whether she likes it or not,' explained the Major; 'she has never tasted such a thing in her life.'

'Well, I never!' exclaimed Mr. Winthrop, knocking the table with his fist. 'That would astonish some of our London friends, would it not, Jefferson, eh?'

'Not more than some of our London friends sometimes astonish us,' observed the Major sharply. 'Do you intend to make any stay in Paris, sir?' he inquired, turning to the Squire, 'on your way to Schwanbeck?'

'I think not. We shall probably go by Brussels.'

'She is not taking any?' observed Mr. Winthrop, pointing to Miss Dart's untouched wine-glass; 'she has only pretended to take some.'

'You have been to Schwanbeck before, have you not, Mrs. Melburn?' inquired the governess.

'Come, I say, Jefferson, keep your legs to yourself,' exclaimed Mr. Winthrop, in agonised remonstrance.

The Major went on eating with imperturbably complacent face. He was saying to himself, 'I have caught him on the very place I tried for—the shin.'

Miss Dart rightly guessed what had happened, and was by no means angry with the aggressor. There are certain social outrages which, like diseases, require desperate remedies—the actual cautery.

'Oh yes; I know Schwanbeck well,' returned the hostess, in low tones. 'It is a beautiful valley, through which a rocky river runs, and surrounded by wooded hills.'

'And a precious dull place too,' observed the Squire, by way of commentary.

'Yes; it is very dull,' assented the lady. It had not seemed dull to her once, when she had stayed there in comparatively good health with Mary, and with a husband not hopelessly estranged; but now she looked to revisiting it with melancholy forebodings. As 'a sorrow's crown of sorrows' is remembering happier things, so there is no place so dispiriting as one we have known under happier auspices, and with which, when weak and ill, and unaccompanied by those who made its sunshine, we are once more compelled to make acquaintance. When those associates are dead, indeed, it affords to some natures a melancholy pleasure to haunt the

spots they once enlivened with their presence ; but Mrs. Melburn had not even that poor solace ; she was leaving the one being she loved—though the time she had to spend with her on earth must needs be brief—and going, for her dear sake, into voluntary exile.

The thought of it made her bruised heart heavy, and to speak of aught else cost a painful effort. She was unaware, as yet, of what was obvious to his male companions, that Mr. Winthrop was drinking more than was good for him, and his loquacity only annoyed her, as in the case of one who in melancholy mood wanders at noon in some congenial pine-wood, and is troubled by the chatter of the jay.

Mary Melburn guessed the feelings that were agitating her mother's breast ; but sympathy made her silent—indeed the circumstances in which she was placed almost enforced silence upon her ; and Miss Dart arrived at the truth, or something like it, by intuition. If her hostess had been alone, she would have left her to her meditations ; but as meditation was impossible, she judged that some topic of interest, such as she had perceived Schwanbeck to be, would be a relief to her ; moreover, though she had no experience of the genus Winthrop, she understood that it was necessary to make conversation, if only to keep it out of that gentleman's hands.

She accordingly addressed her hostess on the subject of the German Brunnen, a topic with which she showed herself so familiar that Major Melburn presently observed, 'I suppose it was your modesty, Miss Dart, that led us to infer that your knowledge of the German tongue was acquired in England ?'

'One has only to have a cold in one's head,' put in the Squire, testily, 'to talk like a native.'

'You seem to be of the opinion, sir, of the gentleman who said, "He spoke all civilised languages, and also German,"' observed the Major.

These interpolations saved Miss Dart from the necessity of acknowledging that she had never set foot on foreign soil ; to have done so, she felt, would have been almost a confession of deceit, for the truth was, she had the rare gift of so assimilating what she had read, that it almost placed her in the same plane with those who had seen.

'I want some more champagne,' observed Mr. Winthrop, tinkling his dessert-knife against his wine-glass impatiently. 'You may say what you like about German—hic—I mean

hock—but there's nothing like "the Boy," except of course'—here he cast a glance of gallantry at Miss Melburn—"the other boy, Cupid.'

With a quiet bow to Miss Dart, Mrs. Melburn rose from table and the ladies trooped out of the room.

As Miss Dart preceded them through the hall, she heard a passionate murmur from Miss Melburn, and the quiet rejoinder of her mother, 'I am not sorry it has happened, Mary, since your father can no longer plead ignorance of his real character.'

In the drawing-room, not a word was said respecting Mr. Winthrop; though now and again conversation was involuntarily suspended when certain sounds were heard—loud laughter, the fragments of a song, and voices raised in anger—from the dining-room. All that had taken place in that apartment, though so importunate in the thoughts of each, was ignored by the tongue. Under such circumstances talk is apt to be hurried and precipitate; the first words that come to the lips are preferable to silence, as when horses are running away down hill an increase of speed, with all its attendant risks, is sometimes less dangerous than to stop. Through these otherwise untoward circumstances it came to pass that the governess found her employer easier to get on with, and less reserved than had hitherto been the case. Perhaps Mrs. Melburn had noted how Miss Dart had come to her rescue on a recent occasion, and was not unconscious that she was now doing her best to smooth matters, but at all events her manner was, by comparison with what it had been, frank and almost familiar.

Happening to speak with curiosity of a book which Miss Dart had in her possession, the governess ran up to her room to procure it. On her way down, the dining-room door was flung open, and the sounds of angry altercation overflowed into the hall. She paused upon the landing, scarce knowing whether to retreat or to go on, and, unseen herself, became an involuntary listener to what was said.

'I tell you that nothing ails me—I am "fit as a fiddle,"' remonstrated a voice, that, but for the limited area of possibilities, she might have failed to identify; as it must needs be one of three, however, she recognised in the owner of those husky and recalcitrant tones Mr. Winthrop. She seemed even, somehow, to become aware that he had dropped his eye-glass, and was feebly fumbling for it.

'You do not know what is good for you,' returned the Major, in half-grave, half-bantering tones. 'As your friend and adviser, I prescribe bed.'

'Never go to bed till small hours; rule I make,' was the uncompromising reply. 'Nothing so good for one as ladies' society after dinner, brush off the cobwebs—beeswing I mean—elevate the mind.'

'You're much too elevated already, my good friend, for ladies' society.'

'Not a bit of it. Like a fellow all the better for high spirits. Seen me in them before—that is, your mother has—I mean your half-mother, your step-mother, your mother-in-law.'

'My sister, however, has not had that pleasure,' was the dry rejoinder.

Here one of the speakers shifted his position, and Miss Dart caught sight of the Major's resolute face as he stepped between his friend and the drawing-room door. She shrank into the extreme angle of the landing, in terror lest he should catch sight of her.

Mr. Winthrop made some rejoinder, which, save for the two words 'Miss Mary,' did not reach her ear, and then once more came the Major's voice, this time much more severe and even menacing.

'There is also another young lady there, sir, who is quite unused to see gentlemen forget themselves.'

'Pooh, pooh, the governess! Why, you old fox'—here there was a sort of smothered snigger.

'Another word, sir'—this in suppressed tones of intense passion—'and I will strangle you outright! To your kennel, you cur!'

There was a short struggle, a shuffle of feet upon the tiled floor as of a man pushed backward by irresistible force, and then a door closed with a crash. The hall was empty.

CHAPTER XI.

COMPROMISED.

MISS DART trembled, but not now with terror: it was rather with excitement. Experiences of human life were welcome to her, and if she felt disgust at what had happened on one account, it was not unmixed with something akin to admiration

on another. The display of physical strength when exerted on the side of morals is always attractive to the female mind, and this is certainly not the less the case when its exercise has any personal application; she could not doubt that it was some disrespectful reference to herself on Mr. Winthrop's part that had been cut short so summarily. Under circumstances that might well have aroused his vehement indignation, the Major had not forgotten that when the dining-room door had closed upon the Squire he had succeeded to his father's place as host; but when the other's conduct grew outrageous, he was surely not to blame for having applied the only argument—that of force—which could be made effectual or even intelligible. He had been patient, firm, and, so far as she herself was concerned, it might be even said chivalrous.

She brought down her book, and conversed upon it with Mrs. Melburn with tolerable self-possession; it was certain that Mr. Winthrop would not put in an appearance, so that she was under no apprehension of a scene; but nevertheless, it was with some feeling of discomfort that she awaited the arrival of the two other gentlemen. Mr. Melburn was the first to appear; he came in rubbing his hands in a nervous fashion, and complaining of the cold; his daughter happened to be engaged on some knitting of the philanthropic sort. 'Busy as a bee as usual, Mary,' he said kindly, 'in making honey for others.' It was not exactly honey, but one cannot expect metaphor to fit all the way round like a woollen sock, which, as a matter of fact, was the article she was engaged upon; then he took his usual station on the rug, but in the reverse position: his face was fixed upon the fire, in which, when we are thoughtful, so many of us find attraction; and his fingers beat upon the mantelpiece a mechanical and monotonous tune. After a considerable interval, the Major followed, indifferent-eyed, and looking even more spick and span than usual. Miss Dart noticed that his white cravat had been changed. He came up to where she was sitting with Mrs. Melburn, and said, 'Poor Winthrop has gone to roost; his day on the downs has tired him out, If *I* had won three prizes out of seven I believe I should have been as fresh as paint; but I have never had his luck, so cannot tell what effect such pleasurable excitement might have had upon me.' The speech was so obviously prepared and apologetic that it was almost an insult to the understanding of those to whom it was addressed. Without deigning to reply to it, Mrs.

Melburn rose at once and joined her daughter ; the governess remained, but in silence.

The Major took the book she had been engaged with out of her hand, and, as though he were making some remark upon it, observed, ' You do not believe one word I have been saying.'

' I believe you sometimes,' she answered, quietly. ' When, for instance, you told me that the air of the downs was intoxicating.'

' There is nothing like frankness,' he answered, grimly. Then in the tone of one who dismisses an unpleasant subject for a pleasant one, he added, ' I trust you and Mary are not going to run away from us when the Governor and Mrs. Melburn go?'

' Most certainly we are ; how could it be otherwise? ' she answered, stiffly.

' Well, at all events, don't be angry with me. I really see no harm in Mary and you being left here under her brother's protection. Then we shall have only two more days together at Burrow Hall?'

' Not one ; your sister and I go to Casterton to-morrow.'

' To-morrow ! Why is that? ' he inquired, sharply.

' Well, at all events, to use your own words, " Don't be angry with me," ' returned Miss Dart, smiling ; ' it has been so arranged, I believe, this evening, because Mrs. Melburn wishes to see us both safely off and out of the Hall—if you were a housekeeper yourself, you would understand it—before taking her own departure.'

' A very pretty arrangement,' he observed, sardonically.

' I think it is a very natural one,' she answered, drily.

His manner piqued her ; however annoyed he might be at recent events, he had no right to vent his irritation on her.

' Perhaps you think it even a pleasant one? ' he inquired, gravely.

' Well—no ; I have no wish to leave Burrow Hall, nor to go to Casterton : a governess ought to have no wishes.'

' You know what is said of a cottage with a double coach-house? ' he answered.

' Yes ; but I do not admit the application.'

' You know, I suppose, that Casterton is not very far away ; or else I might reasonably complain, if not of your pride, of your hard-heartedness, Miss Dart. If you thought you were

never going to see me again, you would have the common politeness, I hope, to say, "I am sorry."

'But I am coming back, as I have every reason to believe, when Mrs. Melburn comes back.'

'But that may be months hence—her return is quite uncertain—and even when you do come back I may not be here. A soldier is not his own master any more than you are.'

'What is it that I ought to say, Major Melburn?'

'Well, you might say, "I hope you will be coming over to see your sister before long." That does not seem to be stretching politeness very far.'

'If you come over to Casterton, we shall, of course, be glad to see you.'

'Why do you say "we"? You are not a royal personage, nor even an editor; why can't you say "I shall be glad"?''

'Very good; so be it.'

'You see, Winthrop and I will be staying on here for some time, and nothing would be easier—or, to use your own phrase—more natural, than that we should come over together.'

'I shall not be glad to see Mr. Winthrop,' answered Miss Dart, decisively.

'I did not ask you to be; that is some one else's affair, not yours.'

'Pardon me, but it is mine. As Miss Melburn's governess, I shall recommend her not to receive Mr. Winthrop's visit.'

The instant she had spoken she perceived her mistake. In thus disclosing the duty that had been imposed upon her, she was not only betraying Mrs. Melburn's confidence, but possibly doing an immense deal of mischief.

'Oh, that's it, is it!' said the Major, bitterly.

His handsome face, for the first time, seemed to be set against her; he looked not only exceedingly annoyed, but antagonistic. Supposing he should tell his father the injunction that had been laid upon her, and that the Squire should insist upon its being withdrawn, what trouble might not her rashness entail upon Mrs. Melburn! what opportunities of persecution upon Mary! There was nothing that she would not have done to make atonement for her imprudence. But what could she do?

'You must please to remember, Major Melburn,' she said, pleadingly, 'that what I have just told you has been said in confidence.'

'I did not understand it in that sense,' he answered, coldly. 'Your communication, which is of much greater importance than you are aware of, Miss Dart, takes me by surprise. I really do not know in what direction my duty lies; there are family interests involved in the matter, and it will be a question for my father to decide——'

'I entreat you as a personal favour,' she interrupted earnestly, 'to say nothing of this to Mr. Melburn.'

'Jefferson, get the candles,' exclaimed the Squire irritably: 'the ladies are going upstairs.'

Mrs. Melburn, indeed, had risen with that intention, and was only waiting for Miss Dart's attention to be disengaged; her conversation with the Major had been so engrossing that this had escaped her notice; no doubt they were all wondering what she could have to say to him of such apparent moment—a reflection in itself discomfiting, but which faded into insignificance beside the trouble that was hanging over her. If the Major should carry out his purpose of speaking to the Squire, it was only too probable that that very night would witness some catastrophe. There was not even time to renew her appeal to his good feeling, or rather, as it seemed to her, to entreat his mercy.

It was therefore with an exquisite sense of relief that she heard these words whispered in a flash as he handed her her flat candlestick—'Leave your book here and come downstairs after it presently.'

As he held out his hand, she could not resist giving it a little squeeze of gratitude. He had not indeed promised to obey her request, but it was hardly to be imagined that, having thus offered her the opportunity of renewing it, he could ultimately decline it. Nothing so bad as that, thought the governess, recollecting her historical studies, had happened since Monmouth pleaded for his life with the second James.

So urgent was the occasion, and so important its claim, that not until the ladies had said good-night to her, and she found herself alone in her own apartment, was there room in her mind for other considerations. For the first time, she then reflected that to have made an appointment with her employer's son in the drawing-room, after the rest of the family had retired, was scarcely a proper thing for a young lady in her position to have done. As she stood at her half-opened door waiting for the voices in the hall, which would be the signal of the Squire's withdrawal to the smoking-room,

she could not help calling to mind a saying of her aunt Richter when conversing with her about her future.

'My dear, you will never make a governess; you are too impulsive, and have too proud a spirit of your own. Though diffident of your talents, you are not sufficiently impressed by the influences of wealth and rank; you have, in a word, too much of human nature about you.'

'That is just why I cannot stand remaining at our "Ladies' College,"' she had answered, laughingly; 'even with the possibility of becoming, at three-score years and ten or so, its Principal. Things are too cut-and-dried and conventional for me there; I want to breathe free air.'

'That can't be done by a governess in a genteel family, my dear; or, at all events, by you,' was the quiet reply. 'You always said, when you were thought to be delicate, that a respirator seemed to suffocate you.'

And now she began to feel that Aunt Jane had been right; and that she was not fitted for her calling. It was true, that as to her present trouble she was, to a great extent, the victim of circumstances; though a little more prudence would have kept her out of it. But she could not conceal from herself that what she was about to do, however necessitated by her duty to others, was itself a rash proceeding, and one very open to misconception. Nevertheless, she had a strong sense of justice; and since she had imperilled her pupil's happiness by her own folly—for her opinion of Mr. Winthrop was by this time no higher than that which was obviously entertained by Mrs. Melburn of him, and if what she had called his persecution of Mary at Casterton should be permitted, there was no knowing how it would end—she admitted to herself it was very right that she should be punished for it.

With a beating but resolute heart, she therefore heard the Squire depart, as usual, to that sanctuary where, under the influence of the kindly weed, men forget even their mortgages, and, candle in hand, ran softly down to the drawing-room to fetch her book.

The Major was waiting for her, and with a grave smile upon his face took her reluctant hand and held it in his own. She did not dare to anger him by withdrawing it, but met his eager eyes with a steadfast look which seemed (if such a thing were possible in one so self-possessed) to slightly disconcert him; he had probably expected that she would have looked down.

'And so, Miss Dart,' were his first words, 'you have taken the shilling?'

'I do not understand you, Major Melburn.'

'What, again?' he answered, gently. 'It seems that I am never to make myself intelligible to you. I mean, of course, that you have enlisted—joined the camp of the enemy.'

'What enemy?'

'Come, come, I cannot believe, Miss Dart, that with your intelligence you have not discovered for yourself how matters stand in this house. Do you mean to tell me that you don't see, for one thing, that my step-mother hates me like poison, and that Miss Mary shares her views? It is probable, indeed,' he continued, cynically, 'that they have been communicated to you by word of mouth already.'

'Indeed, indeed, they have not,' she answered, earnestly. 'How could it have been so? It would have been as indecorous of your people to speak against you to me as it would have been painful to me to listen. It would have been ungrateful in me, too,' she added, after a moment's hesitation.

'You are grateful for very small things, Miss Dart.'

'Consideration and kindness to one in my position are not small things.' She spoke with genuine feeling; but perhaps she would not have expressed herself so warmly but for the urgency of the occasion.

'I am happy indeed,' he said, 'if I have been the means of making you feel more at home in this most uncomfortable house. There are circumstances into which there is no need to enter which, as I have hinted, make an engagement between Winthrop and my sister very desirable. They do not affect me, of course, but my father. When you told me to-night what were your sailing orders from Mrs. Melburn——'

'They were sealed ones,' she put in, promptly. 'It was a dereliction of duty to reveal them. On the other hand, I thought I was safe with you—that is——'

'Do not amend the phrase,' he interrupted earnestly. 'You are always safe with me. For the moment, it struck me that it would be a dereliction of my duty not to inform my father of Mrs. Melburn's plan to thwart his wishes; but I find I am not so dutiful as I thought I was. There are other considerations. For one thing, I would not be the cause of getting you into trouble for twenty Winthrops.'

'You are very kind,' murmured Miss Dart.

'There can be no hard-and-fast lines laid down for one's conduct in these matters,' he continued. 'Both you and I must be governed by circumstances; the attentions of this young gentleman, for example, it is obvious, must not be encouraged.'

'Pardon me, they must not be tolerated, Major Melburn,' interrupted the governess firmly. 'Whatever influence I may possess, let me say, once for all, will be used to exclude them.'

'You have plenty of pluck, I must say,' exclaimed the Major, admiringly; 'but this is a very one-sided arrangement. My scruples, it seems, are to be ignored, while yours are to be respected. How very like a woman!'

'I have the weaknesses of my sex, no doubt,' she answered. 'I acknowledge that you have reason in what you say. Unhappily, it is not in my power—as it lies in yours—to be generous in this particular case.'

'My conduct, in short, like the second pig in the show, is "highly commended," but not to be rewarded.'

'I have, unfortunately, no reward to——'

'Nay, but you have, indeed,' interrupted the Major, eagerly. 'May I tell you what it is?'

He was gazing fixedly into her eyes, but she did not dare withdraw them. It was somehow borne in upon her that it was necessary to meet his gaze with one as firm; and, though her heart beat fast, and her limbs trembled under her, she did so. To show the least alarm at what he was about to say, she felt, would be fraught with danger, though she scarce knew of what.

'You have just told me,' he said, with earnest gentleness, but with a rapid change of expression in his face which did not escape her, and which somehow suggested that he had at first intended to say something else, 'that you cannot be generous to me; I do not ask for generosity, but if I have really laid you under any obligation, as you seem to think, I ask you in return for justice. Will you do me justice?'

'Indeed I will, if you will tell me how?'

'The opportunity has not, as you have just reminded me, yet occurred; but it will occur. You will hear me ill-spoken of, maligned, traduced; my conduct to others, my conduct even to yourself, will be distorted and made to appear the very contrary of what it has been; I shall be presented to you

en silhouette, all black, and you will be required to recognise the portrait. Now, Heaven knows that I am no whiter than other men ; but I ask you to believe that I have my white points—that I am, at worst, like Farmer Jones's horse we admired so to-day—piebald.'

'I will think of you as piebald, and admire you as much as I can,' said Miss Dart, smiling. It was not at all a laughing matter, as she well knew ; but there are occasions even of great moment when it is well to smile.

'Above all things,' he continued, without noticing the lightness of her rejoinder, the cause of which indeed he probably well understood, 'I would ask you, when you are so good as to waste a thought on me, to use your own judgment and not that of other people ; and when inclined to blame, make allowance for me as the judge did for the poor dogs we saw upon the downs to-day. Do this, and we shall be quits.'

'I will certainly do that,' said Miss Dart, earnestly.

'Good-night, good-night.' He pushed open the drawing-room door, which had not been closed during their interview, and held up his finger for silence.

It was a gesture she did not like, for it suggested something clandestine, yet she could hardly take notice of it. He remained in the hall, watching her as she went upstairs, and, as she turned the last corner, waved his hand and smiled. At the same moment she heard a door close in the neighbourhood of Mrs. Melburn's room. She felt the colour burn in her cheek as she hurried to her own apartment. Innocent of harm, she was not indifferent to the imputation of it. There was certainly nothing wrong in her having gone downstairs to fetch her book ; though, unfortunately, she had forgotten to bring it back with her. But the expedition, she could not conceal from herself, had had its danger. It was curious, in one of her keen intelligence, that it did not strike her that Major Melburn was to blame for having necessitated such a step on her part ; but if some slight sense of grievance against him flashed for an instant through her mind, she forgot it and forgave him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE JOURNEY.

SOMEWHAT to Miss Dart's surprise, though she had begun to understand already the strength of will that dwelt in her hostess's frail body, Mrs. Melburn made her appearance next morning at the breakfast table. If she did so, as was probable, with the same devoted courage which the hen exhibits when her chick is threatened with the foe, to defend her daughter from those attentions which, thanks to her maternal precaution, Mr. Winthrop would have no other opportunity of paying for months to come, her apprehensions were groundless; for Mr. Winthrop was not present. He was never an early riser, and perhaps his head ached. A man may have all the goodwill in the world towards champagne, without that mis-called 'grateful' wine reciprocating his attachment: just as in that much-recommended process of hardening a delicate child you may happen to lose him, so in that of seasoning the brain to a favourite liquor you may fail in your object and come to considerable grief. The fact was, that through too much indulgence in liquor, Mr. Winthrop's nerves were not what they had been. The circumstance was much regretted 'in the county,' as in the case of a young gentleman of family and position, who had been pricked for High Sheriff, it was only proper that it should be. It was all the more necessary, as Mr. Melburn gravely argued, that he should be taken by the hand while there was yet time and room for amendment, and exposed to good influences; and what better method could be desired of keeping such a nature straight than that of a suitable and well-chosen marriage? The Squire had so often expressed this view, and in such appropriate and even eloquent terms, that, in encouraging his young friend's attentions to his daughter, he believed himself to be less aggrandising his family than performing a public duty. What his son, the Major, thought of it—who had had better opportunities than his parent of observing Mr. Winthrop's character—he was not called upon to say; and, as was usual with him under such circumstances, he maintained a judicious silence.

Soon after breakfast, at which the mistress of the house scarce uttered a word, the travelling-carriage came round to the door which was to convey the young ladies by road to

Casterton. Miss Dart had been summoned to Mrs. Melburn's room for a word of farewell, and it was literally a word. She had found Mary utterly overcome with grief—as indeed was natural, after such a parting as must have taken place—and her mother, white as a lily trembling on its stalk, but tearless.

'Remember,' she said, with touching pathos, 'my only child is in your hands.'

Then with a sudden impulse she drew the governess towards her and kissed her forehead. Though affected by this painful scene, and deeply penetrated with the sense of responsibility thus imposed upon her, Miss Dart did not feel herself so drawn towards her employer as might have been expected. This personal demonstration had nothing caressing in it; it was more like the sealing of the contract than an impulse of the emotions; and in the pained and anxious face of the invalid there was less of faith than hope. With some murmured but earnest words expressive of her acceptance of the trust that had been placed in her, the governess took her leave. In the hall stood the Squire, with troubled and abstracted looks. 'I hope you will have a pleasant drive, Miss Dart, and—um—enjoy yourself.'

She passed on, that he might have his good-bye in private with Mary, who was following her. At the door stood the Major, with an extended hand, but maintaining a somewhat embarrassing silence. 'We leave you in the sunshine,' she said, with reference to the morning, which was bright with all the promise of spring.

'It goes when you go,' he answered in his gentlest tone. 'I hope that the will which shuts out Winthrop from Casterton has not had a codicil added since yesterday that excludes me also.'

'How could it possibly be so?' she answered, with amazement.

He shrugged his shoulders. 'At all events, I am grateful that it is not. Well, Exile is better than Death; it is not "Good-bye," but only "Au revoir."'

There was a strange mixture, or so it seemed to the ear which it addressed, of jest and earnest in his voice.

He assisted Miss Dart into the carriage, and, as Mary came quickly out into the porch, stood beside the step and performed the like office for his sister. But without so much as touching his hand or casting a glance in his direction, she sprang into the vehicle, and in a broken tone bade the coach-

man drive on. Her veil was drawn down in such a manner that her face was invisible, but it was easy to be seen that she was deeply moved. Her companion pitied her from the bottom of her heart, but she also thought that somewhat hard measure had been dealt to the Major, to whom, at all events, none of his sister's woes were owing. That stranger within our gates, the governess, regards matters that go on amongst us from an independent and unprejudiced point of view. However unenviable may be her lot in other respects, she remains comparatively unaffected by the convulsions which shake the pillars of domestic peace.

Miss Elizabeth Dart, for example, sympathetic and tender-hearted though she was, could not be expected to feel that departure from Burrow Hall as her companion did, who was parting from her mother under such sad circumstances. This was a distinct advantage to Mary, since she was not encouraged to dwell upon her own morbid thoughts. It was, indeed, a lesson to her not without its effect, to note the cheerfulness and vitality of her young friend who, dowered with so few of Fortune's gifts, seemed to find enjoyment or interest in everything about her. The fresh air, the sunshine, the very motion of the carriage over the springy turf, gave her a keen sense of pleasure; the desolate wide-spreading downs, with here and there a fir-clump, or a pond for the sheep to drink at, had a charm for her far beyond that of novelty. If her happiness had any other source, it was hidden even from herself. She experienced, not indeed 'the wild joys of living,' but the exquisite appreciation of mere existence, as she had never done before—not the unconscious delight of a healthy child, but the intelligent gratification of a lover of Nature.

'You have not lived much out of doors, I suppose?' said Mary, smiling at one of these simple bird-notes of admiration.

'Oh, no; at least, never in a wild free country like this.'

'But you would not like to live in it—in that farmhouse, for instance, in the bottom yonder; five miles from everywhere and with not a book in the house, I'll answer for it, newer than "Pilgrim's Progress"?''

'Oh, no, no, no!' she answered, vehemently. 'I like the society of my fellow-creatures, even when I do not like the people themselves. I was not unhappy even at Miss Maigre's.'

'Who was Miss Maigre?'

'She kept the school where I was pupil-teacher before I went to the college. It was a very genteel establishment, with such rules and regulations as never were heard of. "Not to speak more than is absolutely necessary to a servant" was one of them. What a humane provision, what a charming device for promoting Christian sentiments, was it not?'

'I suppose it was to prevent the young ladies gossiping.'

'Not at all; it was to keep them select. "Not to kiss the governesses" was another regulation. The girls were never to forget that they were porcelain and other people mere earthenware.'

'That would have made me very angry, if I had been a governess,' said Mary. 'I can hardly believe it possible. Let us hope it was to discourage the habit of kissing.'

'No. Miss Maigre ignored the very idea of that as an offence. There was, indeed, no punishment for it, just as there was no penalty for parricide in the laws of Solon. The only thing in the regulations which so much as hinted at it was the very last one, which closed the whole code Maigre, as it were, with a snap. "Not even to look at a boys' school."'

'How that would delight Dr. Dalling!' remarked Mary, laughing. 'What he complains of in us women, in whose cause, to do him justice, he is otherwise always ready to do battle, is that we have no humour; if we had, he maintains that life would be much easier for us.'

'I think Dr. Dalling is right; at least, though I don't know whether I have the gift of humour or not, I have often had the rough places made smooth for me by recognising their ridiculous side. Indeed,' she added, gravely, 'one is sometimes tempted to think that Fate itself is a humorist.'

'One hears of the irony of Fate,' observed Mary.

'I don't mean exactly that,' said Miss Dart, gently. 'The idea I wished to convey is, after all, perhaps a painful one. There is doubtless a certain austerity about the ways of Providence, let Renan say what he will.'

'Renan? Do you read Renan?' inquired Mary, with a look of surprise.

'I don't read him, but I have read him.'

'He is Jefferson's favourite author.'

'Indeed,' returned Miss Dart, with indifference, or with what she flattered herself had the appearance of indifference.

There had been something in the other's tone, or perhaps it was only the unexpected mention of the Major's name, which brought the colour to her cheeks. 'It is a strange taste for a soldier. You would say the same, perhaps, of a governess,' she continued, after a pause. 'I do not feel called upon to defend Renan or even myself; but I have read many things which you will have no need to read. The library, which is to such as you a mere pleasure-ground, is to me the armoury from which I reach down the bow and spear by aid of which I live. Without much reading, and that of all kinds, how, with my limited horizon, could I become acquainted with human life? Moreover, books are not only my teachers but my friends. You have never known—I hope you will never know—that sense of isolation which compels one to seek companionship in print and paper because that of flesh and blood is denied us.'

The governess spoke with a deep pathos, that touched the other.

'Your lot has been a hard one; forgive me for recalling it to your recollection.'

'It occurs to me now and then without reminder,' was the bitter reply. Then, in gentler tones, she added, 'I have nothing to forgive you for, my dear Miss Melburn.'

'If you would have me believe you, please to call me Mary.'

'You are very kind; I must be no longer Miss Dart to you, then; my name, Elizabeth, is a somewhat uncouth one, but the person who loves me always calls me Lizzie.'

'The person?'

'Yes; my Aunt Jane. She thinks a great deal of me, I do assure you; and does her best in the way of devotion to make up for the absence of those troops of friends who form the bodyguard of the more prosperous.'

There was a long silence. Was Miss Melburn meditating, thought the governess, on her companion's unfortunate condition, of which it pained her to speak further; or having, in a moment of impulse, made advances of friendship, did she regret them or, at all events, consider that she had done enough to encourage confidence?

Such a reflection was caused neither by egotism nor self-consciousness; it was Miss Dart's way to thread the labyrinth of the mind of others, and track a motive through the maze. A harmless vivisectionist, she was attracted by these studies

of the beating heart, which, if as yet they had profited her nothing, had certainly added interest to a life devoid of ordinary excitements.

They had now arrived at the summit of a great plateau which, however, still stretched before them, obscuring what was beyond. Fifty yards away from the green track they were pursuing was a little eminence, devoid of its usual fir-crown, and Mary proposed that while the horses rested for a few minutes they should visit it.

‘We are still some distance from our journey’s end, Lizzie, but from Downing’s Nob yonder you will see your future home.’

‘And what is Downing’s Nob?’ inquired Miss Dart, as they moved swiftly over the elastic turf to the spot in question—a bare green mound with excavations on it which time had almost healed.

‘It is a barrow it is supposed, but if it has anything to do with Farmer Downing, which—not being a wheelbarrow—is improbable, it must be connected with some ancestor exceedingly remote. Some say it is Dane’s Nob; but though they have dug it half away no one has discovered whose nob it is.’

‘What did they find in it? How I should like to have been at the exploration!’ exclaimed Miss Dart, enthusiastically.

‘You would like to be everywhere and at everything, I do believe,’ exclaimed Mary, laughing. ‘They only found some bones and what the archæologists call implements, which it is very difficult for unlearned persons to identify with anything particular. Now, here’s a view for you!’

‘The sea!’ cried Miss Dart, in a transport.

‘Well, of course it is.’

‘I have not seen the sea for years,’ answered the other, in hushed tones. ‘How grand it is!’

She stood drinking in the scene before her with measureless content. It was really a remarkable spectacle. The downs came to an end abruptly, and looked down like a terrace on a garden, on an immense tract of low, flat land, which seemed to grow higher as it arrived at its boundary—the ocean. This tract had no fences of any kind, but was intersected with rivulets; there were a few farms on it, but not so many farms as old square-towered churches.

‘That is Casterton Marsh,’ explained Mary. ‘The Romans banked out the sea from it, to the great surprise of the Britons,

who thought it labour lost. If it were not for the dyke, the whole district would be under water.'

'But the people?—there seems to be no population.'

'It is very thinly peopled; the air, as its neighbours say (who do not live there), is bad in winter, worse in summer, and only fit for cattle, which feed on the marsh in great numbers.'

'But the cattle don't go to church. Why are there so many churches?'

'That has puzzled wiser heads than ours—I beg your pardon, I mean mine,' said Mary, smiling. 'After the Romans left, the dykes were kept up by the Archbishops of Canterbury; and their graces, it is supposed, caused churches to be built in excess of the population. They are all very old, and some of them, I am sorry to say, falling into decay. The same thing is to be seen on Romney Marsh.'

'That was the Smugglers' Colony, and where the conspirators landed who were to assassinate William III., was it not?' observed the governess, with great interest.

'I dare say it was; I wish I knew as much as you do about things,' said Mary, simply. 'Well, at Rye and Winchelsea the sea has retreated, leaving them, as it were, stranded; but at Casterton it has not quite deserted us. We are still a port, though it must be confessed but little patronised; we are contemptuously spoken of as getting shallower and shallower every day.'

'Never mind,' said Miss Dart, roguishly; 'that often happens even inland.'

'We *don't* mind, Miss. We are very well satisfied with ourselves, I do assure you. And are we not picturesque? Observe, that while that great sweep of down constitutes for the most part only a terrace standing on a marsh, the portion of it above Casterton is still a cliff, as the rest of it once was. And look at our grey little town yonder, with its dear tumble-down old castle, its ancient church, built on a rock, as it should be, and its magnificent hill.'

'It is magnificent, indeed; but it is surely not an ordinary hill. It looks to me something artificial—like this very nob, for instance, only twenty times bigger.'

Mary clapped her hands together and uttered a little shout of gratification.

'What? Does it really strike you so, even at this distance? How delighted Roger Leyden will be when he comes

to hear about it; that is the great test of intelligence with him—whether people think Battle Hill was raised by human hands or not. It must have taken a good many hands, and I am afraid you will find yourself in but a small minority upon the subject. A new recruit will, however, be only hailed with the more rapture.'

'Battle Hill, you call it?' said Miss Dart, thoughtfully. There was an attraction for her in the object in question for which she could not account; it almost seemed to her that she had seen it before; though, if it was so, it could only have been in dreams.

'Was there, then, a battle fought there?' -

'It is said so; others, again, maintain it to be Beacon Hill. Mr. Jones, our Rector, insists upon it that it was called Bacon Hill, because of its having at one time produced beech nuts, which the swine fed upon. Roger Leyden and he are hardly upon speaking terms in consequence.'

They rejoined the carriage, which pursued a level track for miles, with only a low expanse of down on either hand; but Battle Hill was persistently before the mental eyes of the governess.

Even when at last they reached the devious road which led down to the plain, and Casterton in all its old-world glories lay before them, the aspect of that curious hill still monopolised her attention. She could not account for the interest it had excited in her in any way. The case was similar to that not uncommon one where a girl sees a man's face for the first time, and something whispers to her, 'That is your fate;' only this was a hill and not a person. 'Perhaps I shall be murdered there and buried there,' she said to herself; for, amongst her many thoughts, Miss Dart had grim ones; 'and therefore fated to haunt the place for a few hundred years or so. Then, but not till then, I may get a little tired of Battle Hill.'

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE LOOK-OUT.

THE carriage descended the long decline, every turn of which brought into view some new and picturesque feature of the little town—the ruined castle, the high-towered church (once a sanctuary, Mary told her companion, for any one who had committed crime and fled there), the grey gabled houses, the short but massive jetty, with its red-sailed ships: but Battle Hill, topped with fir-trees, all leaning inland, like a gigantic helmet with wind-swept feathers, stood up black against the sun, and dominated all.

Presently they passed over a causeway, with the water lapping both its sides, and even the road itself; for it was high tide, and a fresh breeze was blowing.

‘How delicious is the smell of the sea!’ murmured Miss Dart in an ecstasy.

‘So say I,’ said Mary. ‘Dr. Dalling declares it comes from all sorts of dreadful things: but so do the best scents sold in Bond Street. For my part, when I go to a seaside place that has not got it, I feel the same lack and sense of disappointment as when I take up a dog-violet, which has no smell. Now, is not Casterton a charming old place, Lizzie?’

‘It is a poem. It must be a privilege to live in it.’

‘How glad Mat will be when I tell him that. I am sure mamma need not have been afraid you would find it dull.’

‘I don’t think Mrs. Melburn quite understands me,’ said Miss Dart, quietly. It was the first protest she had made against what she felt had been an injustice. Mary flushed, but answered nothing. Her pained, embarrassed look, and her silence, afforded ample corroboration of the other’s suspicions.

‘I hope *you* will understand me, Mary,’ she went on, gravely. ‘I am not afraid of being understood.’

‘I am quite sure of that,’ returned Mary, earnestly. ‘If I do not understand you just at first, you must not mind that, since, in the meantime, I have learnt to like you, Lizzie.’

The tears rushed to Miss Dart’s eyes.

‘How good you are to me!’ she said.

There was no embrace between them, as would have

happened in the case of most girls, under similar circumstances. Perhaps Mary had been induced to say a little more than she had intended. At all events, she seemed to think that she had said enough.

'Now we are going to have a little shaking,' she remarked, as the carriage rumbled over the little round stones with which Casterton Street (for it had but one) was paved. The grass grew between these stones; there was no traffic; nor, indeed, did they meet with any vehicle until the horses stopped at Mrs. Meyrick's door. The house was of modest size and ancient date. Above the door, and even on the woodwork of the lower windows, were carved fruit and flowers; the low roof projected a foot or two, and threw its shadow on the pavement. Miss Dart had seen such a house in drawing-books (MS.), at Miss Maigre's, but never before in reality.

'It must be very old, is it not?' she inquired as they waited for the summons of the bell to be answered.

'"Old" is a comparative term in Casterton. It is two hundred years old, perhaps—what Roger Leyden calls "a mushroom house."''

The door opened, and, instead of letting light into the house, seemed to emit it into the dark and narrow street. At the end of the passage, and immediately fronting them, was a large window, through which the sun streamed; the countless smiles of the sunlit sea could be seen through it. A statuette and two busts of marble added their white brightness. Though small, the house was not in the least like the cottage home which Miss Dart had been led to expect from Mrs. Melburn's description of it, and still less from its own appearance from without. The front of it was in harmony with its neighbour dwellings: the windows were full of little lozenge-shaped panes, and opened on hinges; a picturesque gloom pervaded it. At the back all was modern, the windows in sashes of single panes admitted light into every cranny. A couple of centuries seemed to have elapsed between the front door, and that which opened on the garden in the rear. In the drawing-room into which the two girls were ushered by the neat little serving-maid, with whom Mary had shaken hands as with an old friend, and greeted with an 'How are you, Janet?' the furniture was comfortable even to luxury, but less quaint than even the fashion of the day approved. The oak panelling alone reminded one of any connection with

the past. Here, too, on pedestals, on either side of the fireplace, were figures in marble.

‘I had forgotten to tell you,’ whispered Mary, noticing her companion’s surprise at this excess of statuary, ‘that Uncle Meyrick was a sculptor.’

Miss Dart nodded an ‘Indeed’; she was too interested in things around her to give attention to any particular matter. The contrast the bright little room afforded to the grand drawing-room at Burrow Hall was very great, but especially in its outlook.

There was but a strip of pleasure-ground between the house and the sea, on which, however, it looked down from a considerable height; but on the right hand the garden broadened and afforded space for some erection formed of glass, which nevertheless did not look like a conservatory.

‘My mistress has stepped out,’ said the maid, ‘not expecting you to arrive so early, but you will find Mr. Matthew in the pavilion.’ With that she threw up the window, beneath which was a short flight of steps, as though the acceptance of her suggestion was a matter of course.

A bright expectant look came into Mary Melburn’s eyes and a flush of pleasure into her cheeks; nevertheless, she hesitated.

‘Perhaps, Lizzie, you would like me to show you your room first, and to take off your wraps?’

‘Not at all; go and see your cousin by all means, I will wait here with the greatest of pleasure.’

‘Wait here? Why should you wait?’ The speaker’s cheek grew crimson.

‘It was only that I understood that Mr. Meyrick was an invalid, and perhaps the presence of a stranger——’

‘Hush, hush,’ interrupted Mary, earnestly; ‘he does not like to be considered an invalid, nor indeed is he one in the sense that you imagine. Though he gets no better, he grows no worse, and perhaps in time——’

Here she suddenly broke off and turned her face to the sea. Whatever were her thoughts, it is certain they were deep and tender. It is to the ocean when we are upon its shore that we naturally turn our eyes in thought; even the boundless blue of the skies, though it speaks a similar language to the soul, affords less encouragement to reflection: the eternity of which it is the symbol does not appeal to us so personally, its depths are out of our sphere.

‘Hullo! Why, Mary!—’

The words, which were musical and full of surprise and joy, came from the pavilion, at the door of which stood a young man, shading his eyes from the sun with his right hand, and with the other grasping the door-post.

‘We are coming, Mat, we are coming!’ cried Mary, as if apprehensive that he would make some effort to meet them, and at the same time moving rapidly towards him. Miss Dart followed at a slower pace. To her eyes the young man presented the appearance of some spiritual picture set in a humble frame—the doorway. He was tall and slight, and, save for that supporting hand, his figure and attitude suggested no infirmity. His face, which was extremely beautiful, was not deficient in colour, or perhaps the occasion supplied it; but the features were delicate as those of a woman, and the curved lips, though smiling, were pressed together mechanically, as is the case with those who suffer from habitual pain. His complexion was very dark, and his hair of that glossy blackness which is more often seen in natives of Spain and Italy than in those of our own even sunniest south. His eyes were large and liquid, and full of expression.

‘Why, you are even better than your word, Mary,’ he exclaimed, as he took his cousin’s hand and welcomed her with effusion. ‘You come to-day instead of to-morrow, and earlier to-day than we could have hoped for.’

‘Mamma thought it more convenient,’ stammered Mary, ‘since she was leaving home. This is my friend, Miss Dart.’

‘We are very pleased to see you, Miss Dart. My mother ought to be here to bid you welcome. But pray step into my little den.’

He motioned that she should precede him, and was about to make his way, after the fashion of lame folks, by help of table and chair to a couch with pillows, that stood in one corner of the apartment, when Mary interposed her arm. ‘Here is your crutch, Mat; you are surely not grown too proud to use it?’

His dark sensitive face took the hue of the pomegranate; it evidently pained him to exhibit his dependence before a stranger.

‘You must consider Lizzie, here, once for all, as one of the family,’ said Mary, gently, translating his look. It was a touching sight to see her lead him to his place—the should-be weak assisting the should-be strong; both so young, but

one so young in vain, since health and strength were denied him. If Miss Dart had not already suspected the love they bore one another it would have been impossible to doubt it as she looked at them. It was a spectacle not easily forgotten. The scene itself, too, was striking enough to impress a much less vivid imagination than that with which she was gifted.

The pavilion, as it was called, was a large room, built entirely of glass, but with a fireplace and shutters and curtains, so as to be available for winter use. It commanded a noble prospect, the sea, the harbour, and the most picturesque part of the old town, including the ruined castle. Whatever less agreeable objects presented themselves were shut out from the view by painted windows, which threw their light so lavishly upon the floor that the India matting with which it was covered resembled a gorgeous carpet. What most attracted Miss Dart's attention, however, were the books, which always act as a magnet to the eye that loves them, in the palace or the hut, in camp or cabin, however strange be the surroundings; it is on them that it naturally settles, as the bee on the flower. There was no great choice of volumes in the pavilion; but what were there Miss Dart recognised at once as her favourite reading—the poets. They were neither in shelves nor slides, but were strewn about in profusion—on tables and chairs, and floor, and on the writing-desk drawn up to the sofa on which, as if exhausted with his recent exertion, the young man lay at length. It might well have seemed to Elizabeth Dart that to live in that fairy bower, with its environments, even under such conditions as were imposed on its proprietor, would have been preferable to her own position, with its common gifts of health and vigour. Was it a hopeless yearning in Matthew Meyrick's face, or a yearning all but equally hopeless in her own secret heart, that forbade the exchange? The idea did but cross her mind and was dismissed.

'Roger has not been here to-day, Mat,' observed Mary, presently.

'What tells you that?'

'Something that does not speak to the ear. I don't smell his tobacco-smoke.'

'But it so happens I have been smoking myself.'

'I know that, too,' she answered, smiling. Whereupon they smiled at one another with tender significance. There are some poor creatures, mere dabblers in the art of love, who would have turned this into ridicule; but Miss Dart under-

stood it thoroughly. If the step of the man one loves, or his voice, is discernible from that of another, why should not his tobacco-smoke be equally recognisable?

The two young people were very far from excluding Miss Dart from their conversation. Her young host, indeed, was most pleasant and genial; nevertheless, she felt that they had matters to talk about that had to be postponed till they were alone together. It was, therefore, rather a relief to her when Mary suddenly exclaimed, 'There is Aunt Louisa.'

The mistress of the house was a lady of formidable proportions, and as she stood on the top of the steps that led down from the parlour, they afforded a pedestal for their full display. It almost seemed that a new statue of life-size, and a little over, had been added to the already numerous Meyrick collection. Though so stately of form, the expression of her face was gentle even to shyness. She was handsome as her brother, the Squire, and very like him; but it was a likeness of mere kinship, which (like its loving) is often of a mere mechanical kind. They had the same strongly marked features, the same aristocratic air, the same coloured eyes, even; but her voice and manner were her own. Where he was patronising, she was kindly; but there was something in her hesitating air which suggested weakness.

Her welcome, like her son's, was cordial, but the manner was less natural. It seemed that while performing the duties of hospitality, which she did with true womanly grace, her mind was occupied with other and less agreeable matters.

At luncheon, which, though served with elegance, was of the simplest kind, Miss Dart noticed that wine-glasses were set before herself and Mary only, till a look from her mistress caused the maid to place one before Mr. Matthew. Mary declined the claret that was offered her.

'I do think,' said her aunt, 'that after your journey over the downs you ought to take some wine. Your mother has placed you in my hands, remember.'

'Very well,' said Mary, smiling, 'I am all obedience. I will have half a glass.'

'What do you think of that as a young lady's notion of being "all obedience," Miss Dart?' inquired Mrs. Meyrick. 'I trust you are not going to follow a bad example. The wine won't hurt you; you need not be afraid of its being a "vin du pays"—a Casterton vintage. It comes from my brother's cellar.'

‘Indeed, I am not afraid of any such thing,’ laughed the governess ; ‘but I never do take wine in the middle of the day.’

‘That is severe on *me*,’ observed Mary. ‘It would only serve you right if I said, “But she makes up for it at dinner, though.”’

‘Mat, I do hope you will have some,’ said Mrs. Meyrick, pleadingly.

‘You know, mother, that I never take wine,’ was the quiet rejoinder.

‘But the doctor says it’s so good for you—I mean this kind of wine. Mary, speak to him.’

‘I am going to drink your health, Mat,’ said Mary, ‘and I hope you will drink mine. I am sure you will not pay me the bad compliment of doing so in water.’

The young man signed to the servant to fill him a full glass. As the cousins pledged one another, it seemed to Miss Dart that Matthew’s eyes involuntarily wandered towards his crutches, which stood in a little rack, made on purpose for them, within reach of his hands. His face, which had flushed as Mary spoke, grew pale at Mary’s words.

When the two girls presently found themselves alone together, Mary spoke of this.

‘You doubtless observed Mat’s behaviour about the wine at luncheon, Lizzie ?’

‘I noticed that it seemed to pain him to have his health drunk, poor fellow.’

‘I didn’t mean that,’ said Mary, with a quick flush. ‘I was foolish to do it, because he is always so hopeless about himself. I was only referring to the wine. You must know, if you have not guessed it, that Mat and his mother are very ill off.’

‘I am very sorry indeed ; I had not guessed it. I should have thought, judging from this pretty house——’

‘That was poor uncle Theo’s doing,’ she interrupted. ‘He was a man devoted to his art, and who loved comfort and luxury. I am afraid he spent all his money, and some of poor Aunt Louisa’s, in that way. She loves the place for his sake, and will never be induced to give it up. There have been all kinds of trouble and worry about it. My father quarrelled with my uncle when he was alive—I believe there were faults on both sides : Uncle Theo was very thoughtless and aggravating ; and papa had no sort of sympathy with his

ways. My aunt, of course, could not endure to hear her husband spoken ill of; and Mat—who would blame him for it?—espoused his mother's cause. The thing has been patched up, but there remains a soreness. When I visit the Look-out, my expenses are always paid, as indeed it is only right they should be, and wine and things are sent with me. Mat never takes wine, not because he doesn't like it, or because it is not good for him—as you heard my aunt say, it is very good for him—but simply because it is too dear a luxury. And he is too proud to drink papa's wine.'

'I understand,' said Miss Dart, softly; nevertheless, this news was a revelation to her. She had been used to poverty all her life; but here was a kind of poverty with which she had been hitherto unacquainted.

'What makes it so dreadful,' continued Mary, 'is that dear Mat feels himself so helpless, and such a burden on his mother; and what I fear is, that there are even worse things behind the ills we know of, and that, with all her economy, poor Aunt Louisa is still living beyond her little income. Only remember that you need never feel uncomfortable about our expenses, because, as I have said, they are defrayed. If you had guessed the real facts of the case without knowing this, I believe you would have starved yourself, Lizzie; at all events, it would have made you very uncomfortable.'

'It is very good of you to place such confidence in me, Mary.'

'Perhaps I should not have done so if you were less clever,' said Mary, smiling. 'I was afraid of your finding it all out for yourself, except about our being paid for.'

Under other circumstances, Miss Dart, perhaps, would have reflected that this was not the first time that confidence had been reposed in her, as it were, on compulsion; but sorrow for the position of Mrs. Meyrick and her son monopolised her mind. She knew the sting of poverty well; but then she had strength and health to bear it, and she had not been brought up in luxury as her hostess had been. With the habit of one used to small economies her thoughts turned to the future. 'But, my dear Mary, if your aunt is now living beyond her means, and your cousin can earn nothing for himself, matters must get worse and worse.'

'Yes; but what my aunt says to herself is, that they will last his time, and for her own she cares nothing. If only during the short space that Fate has allotted to him he can be

made happy and comfortable, she will afterwards be content to live on a crumb.'

'And he does not know this?'

'Of course not, it would kill him if he did. He only knows that she has a small income, and even that knowledge makes him chafe and pine because he has no power to assist her. "What can a cripple with his crutches do for anybody?" he says to himself.'

'Does he get worse?' inquired Miss Dart, gently.

'I cannot say; sometimes I think he does, and then, again, sometimes he seems better. The doctor here pronounces his case hopeless, but Mat has had no really good advice, nor will he consent to take it. Like all chronic invalids, the dear fellow is a little obstinate. "I am a cripple for life," he says, "and no money shall be wasted in buying false hopes on my account."' "

CHAPTER XIV.

ROGER LEYDEN.

THE information which Miss Dart had received as regarded the state of affairs at the Look-out interested her far more than her informant had any idea of, though she counted on her sympathy. It is often said that there are none so kind to the poor as the poor themselves, and certainly there is no bond of union so quickly made as that of a common poverty. Its shifts, its needs, its humble aspirations are understood and sympathised with at once, even if there be no oppressor against whom to make common cause. The reason why ladies of moderate means have so much more to say to one another, and are so much more at ease when they meet for the first time than fashionable women, is that they have something to talk about besides 'gadding and gossip.' Between the folks at Burrow Hall and Elizabeth Dart, a gulf had been fixed; it was not only that the former neither toiled nor spun, but that they were acquainted with none of those anxieties which, while they make rough the road of life to us, undoubtedly add to its interest. It is by no means the least of the misfortunes of wealth that those who possess it are cut off from the hopes and fears that move the majority of their fellow-creatures;

and it is curious enough how even those who have 'made their money,' as the phrase goes, lose touch of these things and stand aloof, or at all events apart from them, so far as sympathy goes, equally with those who are born rich.

The position of the Meyricks not only excited Miss Dart's compassion, but attracted her imagination. It was no ordinary case, such as her own, for instance, of want of friends and means. She pictured to herself her hostess in her youth, as the 'daughter of the house,' a member of a county family, petted and indulged; then, her marriage with the sculptor, no doubt, contrary to the wishes of her friends, and in face of certain prophecies which, however commonplace and conventional, had found their fulfilment. She could well understand the friction that had taken place between the hard wood and the smooth—the Squire and the artist—during her whole married life, and the flame that had come of it when she was left a widow, much worse off than even the prejudices of her kinsfolk had all along prognosticated. Then the boy, the apple of his mother's eye, and such a goodly apple, but with the seeds of death in him—delicate, sensitive, resentful even of the benefits that the enemies of his father would confer upon him; conscious of his mother's poverty, but ignorant of the extent of it; the prey of hopeless love, too. These things, which on an ordinary mind would have dawned sooner or later, presented themselves to the governess with distinct completeness on the instant; her pity, easily moved at the cry of distress, was much more poignant when there was no cry. She felt a vehement desire to help this poor lady and her son which, somehow, was not quenched by the reflection that she had no power to help even herself. Among the miseries of small or no means is seldom reckoned the sense of our utter helplessness to help others in the like calamity; it is, nevertheless, to some people at least, a considerable factor in the sum of wretchedness. That independence of character Miss Dart possessed, and which, however advantageous in some respects to one in her position, had its drawbacks in others, disappeared at once from her manner in relation to her new friends, and caused her to be welcomed from the first as one of themselves. No doubt they felt instinctively that this young woman, who might have taken either side in the family dissension, belonged to their faction.

There was one person, however, for whose approval, whether about things or persons, both mother and son were

wont to wait before making up their minds. This was Roger Leyden, of the Castle. He was so called, and was proud of the designation, not because he kept an inn of that name, but because he lived in the old tower which was all that was left of that once formidable pile. There were no other Leydens in Casterton to necessitate his being so called by way of distinction, but he was always spoken of as 'of the Castle,' as though he had been some territorial magnate. He had been connected with the ruin so long, and was so much more conversant with its history (as indeed with that of the whole district) than any other living person, that one was always associated with the other. If any one came to Casterton in search of information as regarded the antiquities of the place, or its archæology, he was referred to Roger Leyden as naturally as, if his horse had wanted a shoe, he would have been directed to the blacksmith's. His family had been natives of the place for centuries; he plumed himself on having been born 'free' (*i.e.* on his father having been a free-man of Casterton). Notwithstanding this, his youth and early manhood had been spent elsewhere. Having been left an orphan, with very narrow means, he had gone forth, in what capacity it was not generally known, to make his fortune; but at all events he had found it, or as much of worldly wealth as sufficed his simple needs. He had returned in early manhood to his native town, and taken the old tower off the willing hands of the Corporation, in whom it was vested, as a place of residence. And now, after long years, he had become as well known as his dwelling; with which, indeed, to the young folk of the place, he seemed coeval. Some called him eccentric, some a character; but, on the whole, his fellow-townsmen were proud of him, as of one who could give his reasons for the faith that was in him as respected all that pertained to their dwelling-place. There was, however, a rough side to his tongue, as well as a want of sympathy with all commonplace notions, that prevented his being generally popular, save among the poor, on whom he spent much of his substance. The only house where he was a constant visitor, or with whose inmates he was on familiar terms, was the Look-out.

At his own request he had undertaken the superintendence of Matthew Meyrick's education. 'I have been a school-master,' was his modest statement of his qualifications to the boy's mother, 'and though I have never succeeded in becoming

a scholar, it is not through ignorance of what constitutes scholarship. If your lad were as other lads, I should be of little use to him. I could not teach him to push his way in the world, nor to get the better of his fellow-creatures. I cannot even promise to make him love learning for its own sake; but if you will entrust him to my care, he shall learn to hate idleness, and enjoy such pleasures, and they are the truest ones, as lie within his reach. Life will thus be rendered at least more tolerable to him. His companionship will to me be priceless, for you know how dear he is to me; the obligation is wholly on my side. I ask for this post of instructor as a personal favour, and I shall consider it as a sacred trust.'

It need hardly be said that the generous offer had been gratefully accepted by the widow. Roger Leyden had proved himself already a true friend during her husband's lifetime. His advice had been taken when that of all others had been resented, and though he could not prevent Mr. Meyrick's extravagances he had sometimes restrained them. Above all, when Death had beckoned the sculptor from a world that had been little else to him but a land of dreams, Roger Leyden had been the champion of his memory; a chivalrous task enough, since the two men had had absolutely nothing in common save their affection for those whom one had left behind him. Theo Meyrick (as he always elected to be called, though it is probable that his Christian name had had at least another syllable at his baptism) was an artist essentially of the modern type, in the days before art had gone to mediæval sources for instruction. He was very much at his 'ease in Zion,' not only as respected the old masters, but everything else which time had hallowed; and of the Christian centuries unhesitatingly announced his preference for the nineteenth. This of itself was wormwood to Roger Leyden. But when Theo Meyrick put his views into practice, and let light and air into the sacred precincts of the Mayor's House, which, moreover, he newly christened—an act of very adult baptism—the Look-out, Roger's loyalty to his friend was sorely tried indeed. It seemed to him that nothing less than a sacrilege had been committed. He had given certain ancient doors and windows, which would otherwise have been sold as rubbish, sanctuary in the Castle, where they remained a perpetual reminder of that act of Vandalism on the part of the sculptor.

Yet, as we have said, when Theo Meyrick died an unsuccessful artist who, moreover, had wasted his goods, and not only his own goods, Roger Leyden became his apologist and defender. The dead man had made him his executor, an appointment which, though little more than a sinecure, gave him a *locus standi* which not even the Squire could dispute or ignore; and he had stood between him and the widow more than once when such intervention had been sorely needed. He had long ceased to be Matthew's tutor, but only to become his friend, and it was difficult to say whether mother or son esteemed him most. If Miss Elizabeth Dart, indeed, had been aware of his relations with her new friends, and how accustomed they were to regard matters through his spectacles, she might have looked forward to meeting him with no little apprehension, lest she should fail to make a pleasant impression on him, and thereby lose what little ground she might have won in their good opinion.

As regards personal appearance, however, as he presented himself to her eyes that afternoon at five-o'clock tea, he was far from formidable. A frail, slender old man, with a stoop of the shoulders, and long, scanty grey hair, he looked more like some illustration out of a German fairy story than an executor and family adviser; he had large silver-rimmed spectacles, which were always sliding down his nose, and being constantly replaced, with a reproving shake of the head, which set them off again. His voice was shrill, and his manner abrupt to brusqueness, the result, as Mrs. Meyrick was careful to inform her guest, of constitutional shyness; and, by way of salute to the new arrivals, he nodded to Miss Dart with his hand behind him, and pinched Mary Melburn's ear.

'And how is dear mamma?' he inquired, tenderly (as though the Squire and his son were not in existence), and when he was reminded where she was about to go for her health, began to abuse the German waters.

'Why does she not go to Bath? King Bladud flourished before any of the Bads were heard of; but England is never good enough for some people, whether they be sick or sound.'

'If mamma had gone to Bath, Miss Dart and I would not have come to Casterton, Mr. Leyden,' said Mary, reproachfully.

'And then Miss Dart would not have been bored to death,

as she probably will be,' was the unconciliating rejoinder. 'A miserable, dull, grass-grown place this: don't you think so, young lady?'

'It is grass-grown, but to a Londoner like myself that has all the charm of novelty,' said the governess, simply; 'while as to its being dull and miserable, I never beheld so beautiful a town, nor one half so interesting. Some one has called a cathedral a "petrified religion," and similarly your little town seems to me to be a poem in stone and bricks.'

'What do you think of that, Mat?' cried the little man, his eyes twinkling with pleasure. 'This young lady is evidently in your line of business.'

'Nay, I think she is rather in your line, Mr. Leyden,' said Mary, 'from the admiration she expressed for Downing's Nob as we came along, and from the way in which she recognised Battle Hill, when half-a-dozen miles from it, as being an artificial elevation.'

'Viewed from the north, as she beheld it, it ought so to strike everybody,' exclaimed the antiquary, with enthusiasm; 'nevertheless, it showed an intelligence only too rare, and especially as regards the feminine mind, that she recognised the fact. I shall do myself the pleasure, if she will permit me, of going over Battle Hill with this young lady.'

'My poor Lizzie!' sighed Miss Melburn, with exaggerated compassion.

'Miss Dart, you are in for it,' cried Matthew, sympathetically.

The little man looked from one to the other, like a terrier between two antagonists, uncertain upon which to spring; at last he snapped at Matthew.

'There are worse things to be endured, Miss Dart, I do assure you, than being condemned to hear a lecture on antiquities from a competent authority. It is possible that you may, one day, find yourself under the necessity of listening to the lucubrations of an amateur poet. Even my grey hairs have been no protection from that outrage.'

'When I have gone through both experiences,' said Miss Dart, gravely—

'And provided you survive them,' put in Mary, silyly.

'I shall then be able to say from which I have derived the greatest pleasure.'

'Now, I call that very pretty,' observed Mrs. Meyrick.

'Well, well, we will both be friends with her till she decides, Matthew,' said the old fellow, smiling.

'I intend to be friends with Miss Dart in any case,' said Matthew, gallantly.

'That's rank bribery,' exclaimed the old gentleman. 'He is bidding for a favourable criticism upon his epic.'

'I have never written an epic,' protested the young man, blushing.

'I have heard a recitation or two that gave me the impression of an epic; that is, as to length,' persisted the old gentleman.

'Don't you mind him, my dear,' said the widow, encouragingly.

'Don't you mind him, Mat,' echoed Mary, with indignant sympathy.

'Don't you mind him, Mat,' shrieked the old fellow, with satiric iteration. 'If you never saw a spoilt boy, Miss Dart, let me introduce one to your attention.'

'The question in such a case that naturally occurs to me, with my educational instincts,' observed Miss Dart, demurely, is, 'Who was his tutor?'

This sally was greeted with general applause, only increased by the dumb dissent of the little antiquary. He shook his head at the sentiment, and his finger at Miss Dart, and enjoyed the whole situation more than any of them. Such is the marvellous power of genial mirth, that the governess made more way with him by that sly rejoinder, and more surely established her footing in the household generally, than she could have done by the most Machiavellian arts.

By the time dinner was over, for which Roger Leyden remained without invitation, and as naturally as though he were an inmate of the establishment, it seemed to Elizabeth Dart as though, instead of a visitor, she was a member of the family; and that in the Look-out she had found a home. The most convincing proof of it and of her possessing her soul at ease, without those disturbing thoughts which the sense of strangeness and insecurity always engenders, was that on retiring to her room that night she drew forth from her desk a certain manuscript, which had remained untouched during her whole stay at Burrow Hall, and proceeded to enter in it divers memoranda and reflections; such terms are inadequate, yet it is difficult to give them a more

appropriate name, for that manuscript was certainly no commonplace book. Like Madame Roland on the scaffold, Elizabeth Dart often wished for a pen to set down the strange thoughts which arose within her; of late the opportunity had been denied her, or rather circumstances had forbidden it, but now they rolled in upon her brain as unceasingly as the moonlit waves broke in upon the shore in foam beneath her window, and with as clear and picturesque distinctness as the outlines of Battle Hill itself, which rose in majesty above the pavilion.

She as yet had no notion of what she was, still less of what she might grow to be, but now and then, 'in seasons of calm weather' like the present, a sense of intellectual force, quite apart from self-consciousness, was wont to seize and intoxicate her like the inspiration of the sibyl. When it left her she experienced a feeling of exhaustion, and also of disappointment; she almost felt that she had been the sport of some mocking spirit, but it recurred again and again, and each time with increased strength, filling her with a vague consciousness of power. She was no longer the governess and companion, the insignificant unit in the great sum of social life; her whole being seemed to expand, like the Jin in the Arabian Nights released from its bottle, and to spread itself in all directions. Her spirit had wings and flew upward, regarding from a height the world from which it had temporarily escaped, with keen observance and speculation. Her pen flew over the paper impelled by an inexplicable and almost irresistible impulse, and yet among all her crowding thoughts the central one, dwelling in a secret but far from serene seclusion, remained unexpressed. Its form was as yet too vague; in the rational and ordinary moods of her well-balanced mind, before whose gate paced the sentinel Common-sense, it never intruded; but sometimes he deserted his post, and the Fancy roved. She did not know it for what it was, or at all events did not know it for certain, much less did she recognise that other and much rarer attribute which possessed her: but the one was Love and the other was Genius.

CHAPTER XV.

ON BATTLE HILL.

IF Elizabeth Dart was a genius—a matter which, though I have decided in her favour, truth to say, there were some to dispute—(a misfortune, however, which also happened to Shakspeare), she had none of those indolent, happy-go-lucky, take-me-in-the-humour ways which in the public mind is somehow associated with that divine gift. To some people it is almost shocking to learn that Scott was a diligent and hard worker, that Wordsworth was a man of business who practised economies; and I fear that it will arouse incredulity as to the young lady's pretensions when I confess that she was an early riser. Notwithstanding her fatigues of the previous day, and the penwork which, as has been hinted, followed it, Miss Dart rose next morning, if not with the lark, with Janet the little maid, who was going about her work with a song as blithe and on almost as light a wing. But if harmony was dear to Janet, the opportunity of conversation was still more sweet. The cook and she, as she was careful to inform the visitor, made up the household in ordinary at the Look-out, though on great and rare occasions (such as the Squire's coming) the services of a charwoman were enlisted. The cook had been there ever since the mistress kept house, and was her own maternal aunt. Sometimes the springs rose at Casterton and filled the cellar, so that you would think the sea was coming in. At Whitsuntide and Michaelmas there were hiring fairs, when the place was like London Town. Mr. Matthew had been like what he was ever since she (Janet) could recollect. Was it not a pity? It was always such a pleasure to him, and indeed to all of them, to have Miss Mary there. It put new life into them—for Mr. Leyden, though he was very kind, mostly spoke of them as was dead and gone—and raised Missus's spirits. All this information was given gratuitously, and with great volubility. It was evident that listeners were not often to be met with in Casterton, and that even such a chance as the unlocking of the front door for one of them was not to be neglected. There was nothing of fitfulness or gossip in the maiden's discourse: it flowed like a pent-up stream, to which an outlet has been miraculously afforded.

'Which is the nearest way to Battle Hill?' inquired the

involuntary recipient of all this information, in a moment, not of silence, but of recuperation.

‘I don’t know, Miss,’ answered Janet, simply.

‘Good gracious! Why, the hill just outside the town. I see it from my window rising behind the pavilion.’

‘Well, I don’t stir much abroad, Miss; but I suppose it will be what they call the “Loomp.” You turn to the left and then to the right by the grocer’s shop.’

It was as though a denizen of Fish Street, on being requested to direct one to the Monument, had answered, ‘I am not a gad-about myself, but perhaps you mean what our folks call the “Spike.”’

It was, as we have said, Miss Dart’s habit to rise early, but with such a new and interesting world awaiting her as Casterton promised to prove she could hardly have done otherwise. The poet of Nature has assured us that even in old age the sunrise still seemed to him ‘a glorious birth’; and to some of us who are old and not poets, the everyday miracles of earth, sky, and sea have yet their attractions, but a new place that is a town or city, which we happen never to have seen before—the mere work of men’s hands—awakens in us little expectation. It is only one more ant-hill on the way to the grave. But with the young it is different. Such matters have for them the charm of novelty and almost of discovery, it is only the dullards who take them as a matter of course. The narrow streets of this forlorn old town with its pent-house roofs and gables, its massive walls still stubbornly resisting the attacks of time, its ancient gateway with its toothless portcullis menacing the unconscious passer-by, were delightful to the eye of their latest visitor. The silence of the place, unbroken, save by the chatter of the jackdaws about the grey church-steeple, and the distant lap of the sea, filled her with an inexpressible calm. To most minds under similar circumstances such a scene would have been merely an enlargement of the experience, and would have afforded an excuse for the purchase of local photographs, or a topic for dinner-table conversation. With Elizabeth Dart it went far deeper. She pictured to herself the countless generations of her own race who had inhabited these old-world houses and trodden this historic ground. She speculated upon the lives of those who still dwelt there, so peaceful, so secluded, so out of the region in which her own lot had been cast. The traveller sees fifty such places and

has something to say of each—the date of its foundation, the proportions of its church, including the height of its tower, and the genealogy of the Lords of the Manor. This one was sufficient for her, and she learnt more from it than he, though she had not the advantage of his information. No matter how exceptional may be the circumstances of his position the traveller never forgets himself, and expects his reader to be interested in how he slept and what he had for breakfast; as Elizabeth Dart trod the grass-grown streets of this slumbrous town she was unconscious of her own existence, which was merged and lost in that of a hundred generations.

The hill of which she was in quest stood farther off than she had anticipated, though scarcely at such a distance as was indicated by the term 'abroad' which Janet had used. Though it had seemed to tower above her very window, it was, in fact, more than half a mile away. It was visible enough so soon as she had cleared the town, which was fortunate, as not a human being did she meet of whom to ask the way.

This solitude intensified the solemnity of the scene. It might have been some morning after the Danes had landed, as they often had done on that coast, and slain every mother's son in the little town.

From this hill how many times must those thrice-accursed sails have been descried and the note of alarm have been sounded. The Loomp, or Lump, as Janet had called it, was certainly of peculiar formation; it resembled in shape a quartern loaf, as though the upper part had been superimposed upon the lower; but while that homely metaphor at once intruded upon the spectator's mind, it was without prejudice to the picturesqueness of the object in question. From base to summit it was well covered with turf, but of two different kinds—that of the lower half being the short close turf of the downs, that of the upper of a longer and softer kind, plentifully mingled with moss. It was bare of trees except for those few firs upon its apex, which the sea-winds, unable to bend or break, had forced to lean landward. The view from this spot was magnificent and very various. On the north lay the great range of high downland, betraying, where it trended to the west, its old seaboard position. Though the sea was three miles removed, the evidence of its former presence was evident in the waterworn and overhanging cliff.

On the east nestled Casterton, as though secure in the vigilance of its giant sentinel. To the south was the grey, far-stretching sea, lit up here and there by a gleam of sunlight, and flecked by a white sail or red; on the west stretched the vast low-lying marsh which has been already adverted to, with its far-apart church towers and farms.

'A goodly spectacle, is it not, Miss Dart?' exclaimed a voice close beside her.

The governess started, and almost screamed; she was fairly frightened; it had seemed to her that she was the only person just then alive in the world, and even that world had not been the ordinary and every-day working one.

'You have been dreaming,' said Roger Leyden, for he it was; 'a very proper thing to do upon Battle Hill. I do it myself.'

'But how did you come here?' inquired Miss Dart. 'I did not see a soul upon the road, nor was anyone within sight as I looked around me.'

'I was here before you (it is my custom to come here most mornings), and was hidden from you by the tumulus.'

'The tumulus!'

'Ah, you cannot see one,' he replied, contemptuously: 'unless there is something like a barrow, as our earthworms term it, you cannot conceive that you are treading on the bones of captains and of kings. There has been no barrow here, except wheelbarrows—of which I have seen fifty at a time, when Lord Destray ordered the excavations to be made—from first to last. When a man is buried, we put him in a grave, with a mound at top of it; but when a thousand men are buried—dead of the plague, for instance—they are thrown into a pit; when they are murderers, ravishers, Danes, hateful to sight and memory, whom for once you have gotten the better of, and exterminated, can you not understand that a whole hill piled upon them is not too much? That is what happened here.'

'Their bones, then, have been found?'

'No, I am thankful to say, they have not been found. The earthworms have their theories, and my Lord Destray acted on them. At such and such a depth he was told such and such objects would be discovered: the sword, the arrow—with which the long-perished Dead hoped to begin life anew in the other world; the drinking-cup, out of which he would quaff mead in the halls of Odin; the body itself, in a sitting

posture, with an axehead of stone or a bronze dagger beside it. Nothing could be more satisfactory than the forecasts of the experts, down to the minutest detail; only, nothing whatever rewarded the explorers.'

'That must have been a great disappointment to them,' said Miss Dart. She was conscious that the reply would fall short of expectation; but her tongue, ordinarily ready enough for the occasion, somehow seemed to fail her. The old man beside her had spoken with a vehemence and disdain which were incomprehensible to her; she felt that he was moved by considerations in which she had no share.

'Disappointment!' he echoed, scornfully. 'Yes; they were baffled, as such fools deserve to be.'

He bit his lip, and looked round him with an angry air.

'How is it that the grass here is so soft and fresh, Mr. Leyden, and that on the lower part of the hill so short?'

'You have an observant eye,' he answered, regarding her with keen scrutiny. 'The soil above is rich; even your chemist knows the virtue of blood and bone. The soil below—well, that is rich too, perhaps, but after another fashion. It's a sore subject; don't let's talk about it.' Then he went on, more gently, 'I've frightened you again. You must not mind *me*, my dear young lady. Prophets are of no account in their own country, and nobody does mind me hereabouts.'

'That is surely a little ungrateful, Mr. Leyden, since I know some of your neighbours, at least, who regard you with both respect and affection.'

'Your hostess and her son—true. It was not because I had forgotten them that I spoke as I did. The world is divided for me into men, women, and Meyricks. It is only the last with whom I have any concern.'

'Miss Mary Melburn would scarcely like to hear me repeat that, I think.'

'Pooh, pooh! She would not believe you if you did. Indeed, I would not have you yourself, Miss Dart, set me down altogether as an ogre. Only when certain matters come into my mind, they make me misanthropical. To think that that good woman yonder'—he pointed in the direction of the Look-out, where the painted windows at the rear of the pavilion were reddening in the sun—'should have to pinch and save for want of what could be so certainly obtained, if some folks had only a little faith! To see that poor boy pine and dwindle because the skill is dear which

could make him, I am persuaded, like other men; and to know that one has only to stretch out one's hand!—Bah! it makes me mad to think of it! Forgive me,' he added, abruptly. 'Inadvertently, you touched a chord in this old-fashioned, out-of-gear instrument, and have produced harshness, caterwauling. You seem to like the old hill?'

'I admire it above everything. I have never seen any prospect half so glorious. It seems to me that to live at Casterton, amid such scenes and associations, must be one of the highest privileges within the gift of Fortune.' She spoke with flushed cheeks and earnest eyes; it was plain that she was paying no compliments.

'Yet people come and call it an interesting place to spend a few hours in. They come *here*, even, and say, "What a great hill!" They have eyes, but they have no souls; that's what is the matter with them.'

'Janet calls it the "Loomp,"' said Miss Dart, smiling.

'So they all do, hereabouts. The strangers are no worse than their neighbours. Familiarity breeds contempt.'

'But not with you, it seems.'

'No, not with me,' sighed the old man. 'In a few short years this neglected voice will be dumb; and then there will be none—no, not one to point the road.'

His chin sank upon his breast; his eyes were fixed on the ground which, with his foot, he feebly stirred. As he did so, he seemed, Antæus-like, to gather strength; for presently he raised his head, and exclaimed, in loud, sonorous tones, 'And yet it is not lost, but only hidden. Before yonder sea gives up its treasure, this one surely shall be found. Such waste of wealth cannot go on for ever. Centuries hence it will be found; but in the meantime the Good will lack, the Young decay. Heaven's will be done!' He raised his hat, and the wind scattered the grey hairs about his head; his face presented a picture of quiet resignation. 'Come,' he said, rousing himself with an effort, 'they will be waiting breakfast for you at the Mayor's House' (he always called it by its old name, and never the 'Look-out'). 'I must not teach you to dream; that is only fit for an old man like me. You are a worker, and will work to some purpose, or I am much mistaken. Let us go down.'

CHAPTER XVI.

CRITICISM.

WHEN Miss Dart returned to the Look-out she found the family already assembled at the breakfast table. When they heard who had been the companion of her morning's walk the two young people did not spare their insinuations.

'You met by appointment, of course,' said Mary, confidently.

'It was made last night,' observed Matthew. 'I heard the old gentleman say he would be her cicerone.'

'It was remiss in Aunt Louisa not to have offered to be her chaperon,' remarked Mary.

'What nonsense!' put in Mrs. Meyrick, reproachfully. 'We all know that Mr. Leyden always *is* on Battle Hill five mornings out of six.'

'Just so, dear aunt,' said Mary, sweetly, 'and no doubt Lizzie was aware of the fact; that is what we think so indiscreet in her conduct.'

The badinage of the cousins pleased Miss Dart, since it was a sure sign of their being at ease with her.

'I only do not confess that I have fallen in love with Mr. Leyden,' she said, boldly, 'because, if I did, you would tell him.'

'Bravo, bravo!' cried Matthew, clapping his hands. 'This is as it should be.'

'Well, of course I knew it would be so,' said Mary. 'Now tell me all about it, Lizzie. I mean what you *can* tell us. Did he cast your horoscope last night, and predict your future fortune for you?'

'You don't mean to say Mr. Leyden is an astrologer?'

'At all events,' persisted Mary, 'he is a firm believer in the conjunction of the stars. Everything of importance he undertakes is done under a certain position of the heavens, as he terms it. Over his door are three serpents with their tails in their mouths.'

'My dear Mary,' interposed Matthew, 'the serpents have nothing to do with astrology; they symbolise eternity—the time it took to make that poor old castle of his habitable.'

'My dear Matthew,' observed Mrs. Meyrick, gravely, 'you are confusing Miss Dart.'

‘Which was unnecessary,’ murmured Mary, ‘since she looked so much confused upon another account.’

In this raillery of Mary’s, Miss Dart did not fail to recognise and welcome a novel condition of mind. At Burrow Hall she had shown no such disposition for such mirth; the high spirits of youth had been oppressed and kept under by a very Battle Hill of care.

‘Seriously, Lizzie,’ she continued, ‘did not our dear old friend say some things that astonished you?’

‘Well, yes, he did; but it was rather his manner than his words that astonished me—the excitement and irritation which he seemed to labour under when mention was made of certain subjects.’

‘The treasure! You don’t mean to say he got upon the treasure?’ cried Matthew. ‘He rarely mentions that even to us, and never to strangers.’

‘Strangers?’ put in Mary, with demure reproach. ‘As if he considered Miss Dart a stranger.’

‘He really did hint something about wasted wealth—some recommendation of his that had been discredited.’

‘Then you must be in great favour with him, Miss Dart, I promise you,’ said Mrs. Meyrick, smiling.

‘I am very, very jealous!’ exclaimed Mary. ‘Mr. Leyden has not spoken to me upon that sacred subject for years.’

‘But what is the subject?’ inquired Miss Dart, with interest,

‘Well,’ said Matthew, ‘you must know, or rather you do know, for Mary tells me you know everything, that it was at this spot that the Saxons under Egbert, or at all events during his reign, defeated the Danes. While employed in their usual occupation of plunder and pillage, they left their fleet at Casterton insufficiently guarded, and the Saxons destroyed it. After the Danes had had an exceptionally good time and sacked the churches of London and Canterbury—please note that fact—they came down here with their plunder to take it back to Denmark, and found no means of transport. Improvident persons are often accused of burning their boats, but in this case it had been done for them. In the meantime Egbert gathered together his forces, the whole district rose against the invaders, and for the first time they found themselves on the defensive. The chronicles affirm that they gave battle to the Saxons outside the town, and were not only defeated but exterminated. All beyond this is conjecture, but

the theory is that before the catastrophe they buried their ill-gotten treasure. It is tolerably certain that it was never found, since Mother Church, who had a keen eye for her possessions even in those days, had to put up with her loss, and the shrine of Canterbury, which had been for years the richest in England, remained for centuries one of the poorest. Now, it is Roger Leyden's contention, that because Battle Hill was obviously the most convenient spot to hide it, in readiness for embarkation in case the invaders had been victorious, or one of them had survived to fetch it, that the treasure lies there. His view is that the Saxons buried the enemy in thousands where they lay, heaping up on them—partly from the necessity of the case, but chiefly as a record of triumph—the largest sepulchral mound which was ever seen, and that with every spadeful they hid what was their own, and made it more difficult to recover it.

'When the excavations took place, many years back, by the order of the late Lord Destray, Mr. Leyden laid his views before his lordship. "You will not find any relics of the slain," he said, "at the usual depths for such discoveries, you will have to dig much deeper." So far he was right; only, since no bones were found, his lordship, who found the job, even as matters were, very expensive, declined to believe in their existence. A good many people are of his opinion, and indeed the place is more often called "The Lump" than with any reference to the historical incident which is supposed to have taken place there. As to digging through the upper part of the great hill and then through the lower, it is hardly to be expected that any one who has the money would be sanguine enough to do so at the recommendation of an enthusiast such as our friend. The present Lord Destray is in embarrassed circumstances, and the last man likely to undertake such an enterprise; so in all probability the truth of the matter will never be ascertained. In the meantime, one feels thankful that dear Roger Leyden has not ten thousand pounds of his own, since he would infallibly spend it all in buying Battle Hill and excavating it.'

'Still, Mr. Leyden may be right,' observed Miss Dart, thoughtfully.

'Now, this is very serious,' observed Matthew. 'It is bad enough to have a fanatic next door, but that he should find a convert under our own roof is terrible to contemplate.'

'I only said "*may* be right,"' remonstrated Miss Dart.

‘That is the first step, the next is “*must* be right,” the third is taking spades on starlit nights (with a large sack to hold the treasure-trove) and digging upon Battle Hill with Mr. Leyden. I can see them at it, my dear mother.’

‘For shame, Matthew!’ said Mrs. Meyrick, reprovingly. ‘You know you cannot see anything of the kind. I am glad to say you will not be worried any more by my son, Miss Dart, for the next few hours, for it is the children’s morning.’

As her hostess rose from the table Miss Dart postponed her natural desire to learn what ‘the children’s morning’ might mean for a better opportunity; but when she found herself alone with Mary, with whom, though she could scarcely be called her governess, it was arranged that certain improving works should be read and discussed daily, she put the question with no little interest.

‘The fact is,’ said Mary, with a flush of tender pleasure, ‘that poor Matthew, though so ill and seldom free from pain, has a horror of being what he calls a mere cause of trouble and anxiety to others without being any good in the world. So three times a week he receives detachments of poor children, to whom he reads and plays. It is the only education some of them ever get, and never was schooling half so welcome. The little folks of Casterton adore him, and he takes no less pleasure in their society than they in his.’

‘How I should like to see them together!’ said Miss Dart.

‘That I am afraid can never be; the introduction of a grown-up person, he affirms, at once destroys their enjoyment, though with him they are as natural and as much at their ease as though he were their own age. I wonder whether it would annoy him if I were to show you a little poem he made upon them? To me it is simply charming; but if you do not like it, please don’t let him know that you have seen it. He is very sensitive, poor fellow, to every breath of censure. I am quite thankful to think that circumstances prevent the dearest wish of his heart being indulged—*i.e.* the publication of his poems—lest criticism should kill him, as it killed Keats.’

‘Let us say, as it was fabled to have done so,’ said Miss Dart, with a touch of professional manner. ‘If I am favoured with a sight of these verses, which I should extremely like to see, I promise you that nothing I shall say of them will kill your cousin.’

Mary produced from her desk a little roll of MSS. ; they were beautifully written out in her own handwriting and tied together with a slender chain of hair, of the same colour as her own. Miss Dart could not help reflecting how sacred would these poor mementoes become to their possessor should anything happen to the author of them. 'I feel it is a breach of confidence,' murmured Mary, remorsefully ; 'and yet I am sure he would so value your opinion.'

An observation which, being paraphrased, thought Miss Dart, would run thus, 'And yet it would be so sweet to find that you shared my admiration of his talents.' The poem which Mary put into her hand was called 'The Children.'

To grown-up beauty men are fond
Of singing frequent praises ;
Alike they laud brunette and blonde
With pretty high-flown phrases.
To me, though such ripe loveliness
No doubt is far the rarest,
Of all things fair, I must confess,
The children seem the fairest.

The children with their happy looks,
Their little joys and sorrows,
Their frank delight in picture-books,
Their wealth of bright to-morrows—
What heart but in their tiny hands
Is soft as wax for moulding?
What eye that sees their elfin bands
But joys in the beholding?

Would those kind powers that dispense
Aladdin gifts befriend me,
No thorn crown of pre-eminence,
In letters they should send me ;
Only the skill to wake delight,
Like some old story-teller,
That for the darlings I might write
Such tales as Cinderella!

No bland reviewers' suavity
Of eulogy I'd covet,
They, with their eager gravity,
Should read my book and love it.
And they should come about my chair,
Their fondness all my glory,
And climb my knees, and pull my hair,
And thank me for my story.

To them when summer-time was bright,
 Among the cowslip meadows,
 Or round the winter fire at night,
 While rose and fell the shadows—
 Their faces all towards me bent,
 Their eyes with pleasure glistening,
 Their cheeks aglow with wonderment,
 And all intently listening—

Would I discourse of gallant knights,
 Their triumphs and distresses;
 Of giant foes and tourney fights,
 And beautiful Princesses,
 Of wide enchanted wanderings,
 In distant tropic prairies;
 Of fairies, and all fairy things,
 To these that are my fairies.

And when in far-off after days
 My tales should all be over,
 Though no rich cenotaph of praise
 My memory shall cover;
 In some few hearts my name should wake
 A touch of old affection;
 And kind remembrance for the sake
 Of early recollection.

Miss Dart read it over to herself with great attention, while Mary watched her with glistening eyes.

‘How do you like it? I do hope you like it, Lizzie?’ she said, earnestly.

‘I think it most tender and touching.’

‘Oh, I *am* so glad; and then you are such a good judge, too.’

‘I am not at all sure of that; but I have read a good deal of poetry, and have at least some sense of proportion. I know of few poems on the same subject that strike me so favourably.

Of fairies, and all fairy things,
 To these that are my fairies

is a charming couplet.’

‘But if it was published, what would the critics say?’

‘I cannot answer for the critics. If it came out in a magazine it would be magazine verse, you see, which would be fatal. If it was published in a volume it would be by a new poet, and that also would be fatal—scarcely a day passes in which we do not hear compliments paid to writers of

another age, while not a month comes forward that is not loaded with invectives against the writers of to-day. The dullest critic who strives at a reputation for delicacy by showing that he cannot be pleased may pathetically assure us that our taste is on the decline, and consign every modern performance to oblivion. Such general invective, however, conveys no instruction; all it teaches is that the writer dislikes an age by which he is himself probably disregarded.—‘That is not my thunder,’ added Miss Dart, smiling, ‘but Oliver Goldsmith’s; and what was true in his day is true in this. There are only a very few who are capable of judging literature, and far less poetry, on its own merits.’

‘Then you would not advise Matthew to publish his poems?’

‘I should not venture to advise him one way or the other; but if I had written a poem like this, and others equally good, I don’t think I should be afraid of criticism.’

‘Kiss me, Lizzie,’ said Mary, simply.

She obeyed, of course, and very willingly, and Mary hugged her in return. Nevertheless, it struck Miss Dart that it was scarcely a fair exchange of kisses. Her kiss had been given to Mary upon her own account, whereas Mary’s kiss was paid, as it were, to the credit of somebody else; it was a kiss at secondhand.

CHAPTER XVII.

LITERATURE.

In the afternoon, when the children had departed, Mrs. Meyrick and Mary paid a few calls in the town, and Miss Dart was left to keep Matthew company. It was only very seldom that he was well enough to leave the house even in the invalid-chair constructed for that purpose, and he was much averse to such progresses, which even in that sparsely populated place attracted some public attention. It was a charity, he said, for any one to sit and talk to him, and the governess was nothing loth to undertake that task. He interested her very much, and she was glad to make further acquaintance with him. He invited her into the pavilion that he might

have the pleasure of introducing her to his friends, as he termed showing her his books.

Friends, indeed, and no fair-weather ones, they are to all of us, and even if we differ from them, they will be no parties to the quarrel; we may 'shut them up,' but they will not be offended; we may 'drop' them, but they are always ready to resume relations upon the old footing. We select them, grave or gay as our humour prompts, but they have no jealousies of one another; in these respects it must be acknowledged that print and paper have the advantage over flesh and blood. But to him whom ill-health confines within four walls books are something more than friends. Love itself smiles on him from their pages and touches his lonely heart. Through them he sees the world from which he is debarred reflected from a hundred points of view; on his couch, thanks to their magic art, he travels as on an enchanted carpet to distant lands; through them his sympathy and his pity, which might lack an object, are kept alive and healthy. Above all, the capable soul which often resides in the frailest tenements of clay is led by them to the topmost heights of thought and the brightest realms of fancy.

So was it with Matthew Meyrick. Condemned for life to pallet and cell, he had roved at his own sweet will through the bright fields of imagination and humour, and his mind was adorned with their choicest flowers. Of practical matters he knew little or nothing, and did not seek to know. This was, in some respects, fortunate for him, since the fruit of that Tree of Knowledge must needs have been bitter for him; it was not through selfishness, or the reflection that they would last his time, that his eyes were closed to his mother's straitened means, or the end to which, economically as their little household was managed, their mode of life was slowly but surely tending: she had designedly deceived him upon that point, and it was not one, when once he was assured that all was well, in which he took much interest. He was aware that her income was small, and had shown his recognition of the fact by obstinately refusing to be taken to town for advice, and would probably have done so had the hopes of any benefit to his malady resulting from such a course been much less problematical than they were; but of the actual position of her affairs he had no suspicion. The effect of even the partial disclosure of it had not been such as to encourage her to further revelations. The avoidance of any reference

to ordinary matters in his conversation would, as savouring of affectation, have been a drawback to most people, and would certainly have been so to Miss Dart, who put Humanity (as a topic) first, and Literature afterwards; but his peculiar position was an excuse for him. He talked of books, and books only, for the same reason that others talk of bullocks; it was the only subject he was acquainted with. He spoke, as is the habit with all invalids, of his own concerns, tastes, and prejudices, but without that egotism which illness often engenders.

‘There is my Lord and King,’ he said, pointing to a voluminous edition of Shakspeare, with one hand, while he supported himself on his crutch with the other. ‘He is the master of the ceremonies who introduces me to my fellow-creatures; without him I should be almost as much estranged from them as Crusoe on his island.’

‘There is none like him, none,’ observed Miss Dart, in a tone of subdued enthusiasm.

‘You are quoting Tennyson,’ said Matthew, smiling.

‘To be sure, I had forgotten; the observation is in “Maud,” is it not?’

‘Yes; there is no poet so much quoted without recognition. The reason is that, among his minor charms, he has the art of clothing common things in a poetical dress; he could, I am certain, describe a gas manufactory in the most harmonious manner.’

‘He has pictured a very prosperous one,’ observed Miss Dart, silyly, ‘in that very volume which you have just accused me of plagiarising from: “and mellow metres more than cent. per cent.”’

Matthew threw back his shapely head, and laughed aloud; a literary joke always tickled him.

‘I shall never read “The Brook” again,’ he said, ‘in the proper spirit.’

‘Yet a great philosopher has said that no man holds his religious faith sure and certain who cannot afford to laugh at it: a hard saying for most people, no doubt, but, on the whole, a true one.’

‘There is, at least, no fear in that case of being laughed out of it,’ observed Matthew.

‘It means more than that, I think. You ought yourself to know the weak points in your citadel, and to be confident in its strength, in spite of them.’

‘But is it not possible to have a citadel without weak points?’ he suggested, thoughtfully.

‘With some people no doubt it is: they are, however, exceptionally fortunate.’

‘I should, on the contrary, have said that such folk were the majority.’

‘I am speaking of sure and certain Faith, not the mere capacity for credulity. The majority of mankind have no citadel, but only an earthwork, from behind which, because they can see no enemy, they exclaim, “This is impregnable.”’

‘You think about these matters a good deal,’ observed Matthew, with interest.

‘I have done so, though, I fear, to little purpose,’ she answered. ‘The effect of such reflections is often only to make one self-conscious—a very contemptible state of mind, whether in man or woman. For my part, I have done my thinking, if I may designate by so high a term those obstinate questionings of sense and outward things, those blank misgivings which, as Wordsworth yonder tells us, belong to the period of youth; he speaks of “worlds not realised.” I wish to realise them; if not “eager-hearted as a boy when first he leaves his father’s field,” I am the reverse of the lotus-eaters with their “we have had enough of action and of motion, we.” I have had enough and more than enough of stagnation. I desire to look about me and see what is going on.’

‘And yet you have come to Casterton?’

‘I am very glad I have come. Folk are more picturesque here—I mean in character—than in London. You know what the poet says about that?’

It was kind and considerate of her to thus alter her manner of talk to suit his mood, but he had no suspicion of any such design in it. He thought it nothing surprising that when her mouth did open should fly a trope, or a quotation, and took her for a devotee at the shrine of Apollo, like himself.

‘Which is your favourite poet, after Shakspeare?’ he presently inquired.

‘Shakspeare is not my favourite, though so far the greatest,’ she answered frankly; ‘it is only a very few people who can say of the king that he is their best friend.’

‘You comfort me,’ he answered, smiling; ‘I always ascribed it to my own feebleness that I find less pleasure in his society than in that of some of his inferiors.’

‘Of course one feels the difference of degree,’ she answered; ‘but besides, one is not always in the humour, as the American poet so charmingly confesses, for the grand old masters. The strong meat of Milton, for example, once a month is as much as my constitution can stand.’

‘Being an invalid, I partake of him even at longer intervals,’ observed Matthew, demurely.

‘But you are never afraid of *Revalenta Arabica*—Keats and Shelley,’ she put in, slyly.

‘How shocking!’ he exclaimed. ‘All the good opinion I had begun to entertain of you, Miss Dart, is now scattered to the winds. How dare you to speak so of Keats? Think of his “Nightingale” with its woful picture of the world,—

Where palsy shakes a few last sad grey hairs,

Where youth grows pale and spectre-thin and dies,

Where but to think is to be full of sorrow and leaden-eyed despairs.’

It was evident, from the pathos and earnestness of the speaker’s tone, that the lines he quoted had, in his eyes, a personal application.

‘But that is just what I complain of in your Keats,’ observed Miss Dart, drily; ‘there is no poet more suggestive than he, but he “melts the waxen hearts of men.” He is as morbid, though not in the same selfish and sullen way, as Byron.’

‘I love him,’ said Matthew, simply.

‘Yes; but quite as much for his defects as his merits, and most of all—now confess it—because he reflects your own mood.’

‘There may be something in what you say,’ admitted Matthew, reluctantly.

‘It would do you good,’ observed Miss Dart, didactically, ‘to read Crabbe for a fortnight.’

‘But he is so deficient in imagination.’

‘He has none, and that is why I recommend him. He deals with facts that are outside ourselves. If he makes one weep, it is never on one’s own account. He does not appeal to our weaknesses, or lower the system, as the doctors say. He is a sure tonic.’

‘Shelley is tonic enough for me,’ said Matthew. ‘I admire him, I think, even more than Keats.’

‘And you do not love him so much? Come, be honest.’

‘Well, no, I do not love him so much. He occasionally appeals to sympathies that seem altogether beyond me, and

irritates me even when he is most charming—as in “The Cloud”—by becoming unintelligible. This is unpardonable; because no writer—not even Tennyson—was ever gifted with greater grace of expression, while he is as harmonious as the bird he has immortalised. What music and almost colour there is in his “Sensitive Plant”! what pathos, even, in the highest melodies, such as his “Lines to an Indian Air”! He never gives us a false note.’

‘Very seldom,’ said Miss Dart.

‘Never, never!’ he answered, impatiently. ‘What can be more exquisitely accurate than those lines in “Dejection”?’—

Alas, I have nor hope nor health,
Nor peace within, nor calm around,
Nor that content surpassing wealth
The sage in meditation found;
And walked with inward glory crowned.
Nor fame, nor power, nor love, nor leisure.
Others I see whom these surround,
Smiling they live, and call life pleasure.
To me that cup has been dealt in another measure.’

The words lost nothing of their beauty in Matthew’s delivery of them, though at the close his voice trembled a little, as the song of the lark when he nears the ground. It seemed that he had forgotten the presence of his visitor, for he moved quickly on his crutch to the window, where she heard him murmuring to himself those admirable lines beginning, ‘One word is too often profaned for me to profane it.’ There could certainly be no doubt of the reference they had to his own case; and the plaintive and despondent tones of his voice thrilled the listener’s very soul.

I can give not what men call love;
But wilt thou accept not
The homage the heart lifts above
And the heavens reject not?
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.

‘You are wrong,’ said Miss Dart, her cold critical tones breaking a long silence, and contrasting strangely with the other’s impassioned speech—‘you are wrong about Shelley never giving us a false note, as is shown in those very lines.

“Accept not” and “reject not” can surely never be what Webster calls even “an allowable rhyme.”

‘You are quite right,’ exclaimed Matthew, in amazement; ‘but how is it possible, since I have had those lines by heart for years, that such a defect could have escaped me?’

‘Just because you had them, as you say, by heart. In your admiration of the sentiment of the poem you forgot to criticise it.’

‘I cannot criticise. I wish I could.’

‘Why so?’ inquired his companion, smiling. ‘Is it not enough to be a poet?’

‘A poet? Who told you I was a poet? Ah, it was that foolish talk at dinner yesterday! It is true I have written a few little things—Heavens, how the tin-pot mock modesty of the amateur author seems to ring in that sentence!—yet I should be sorry if you were to set me down in such a category—that is altogether, Miss Dart.’

‘I am inclined to put you much higher; that is to say,’ for she suddenly remembered that the poem which had so struck her fancy had been shown to her in confidence, ‘your appreciation of the poets seems to me quite different from that of the poetasters. If you would show me what you have written—although I am no critic, I am accustomed to winnow chaff from wheat—perhaps I could point out here and there some defect which has escaped you, or even suggest—’

‘My dear Miss Dart,’ he interrupted eagerly, ‘it would be such a charity! Roger Leyden cares for nothing that is not a thousand years old. I have no one else to advise me; and sometimes I think there is really something in what I write, and again sometimes that I am the same in mind as I am in body—just a feeble, barren, unnecessary creature.’

Whether Matthew Meyrick was a poet or not could hardly affect the question of his general usefulness; but Miss Dart understood what he meant as well as if he had expressed himself with the accuracy of a French mathematician. It is, in fact, only the merest paper-spoilers and blockheads who look forward to seeing themselves in print, as a woman looks in a hand-glass in ‘admiration,’ and not ‘for advantage.’ Almost all of us have a modest hope that our work will serve some purpose other than the lining of a trunk, and elicit some spark of sympathy from a kindred nature. In Matthew’s case there was also the wish to gain touch of a world from

which circumstances had debarred him, but with which, in secret, he had a passionate desire to mingle.

With a blush at his own audacity, but without more ado, he opened his desk and brought out for his companion's inspection a bundle of MSS.; an action that would have alarmed some people very considerably. To one like Miss Dart, however, who had been used to looking over examination papers, the ordeal was not so very formidable; and as it happened, she was more than repaid for her good-nature by what she read. It was not that the poems themselves were very original, though they had genuine merit, but they proved a complete index of the writer's mind, and afforded a study of character such as had never before been afforded her; in the pursuit of which kind of knowledge the governess, as we know, displayed all the eagerness of the vivisectionist combined with a sympathy for the subject of inquiry from which the latter is so infamously free. In these compositions of an invalid, she expected to find very little that was objective; much that was personal and morbid: the prolonged expression of pain, disappointment, and despondency.

So far from this being the case, the keynote of the poems was cheerfulness; there was nothing of the atmosphere of the sick-room about them, and when they touched upon that topic at all they dwelt not on the patient but on the watcher:—

Weary? No, I am not weary; only of seeing you so.

Do not you think for me, dear; I rest in the daytime, you know.

That was probably what his mother had said to him in prose a hundred times, as she sat by his pillow; but it was significant that he had put on record what she had said to him and not what he had said to her.

Again, though the form of the verse showed in almost all cases from what mould it came, and its harmonies were often the echo of older music, the thoughts were generally fresh and bright enough. Upon the whole, Miss Dart was able to speak well of Matthew's productions without any strain of conscience, and, as a fee for her services, requested that one of his poems should be given her—a request that pleased him almost as well as her praise. Of the latter, indeed, she was so far from lavish that, though she had a scheme through which she hoped his talents might obtain some recognition, she concealed from him the high opinion she had actually formed of them lest disappointment should come of it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HOROSCOPE.

WHATEVER shadow might be hanging over the little household at the Look-out, in the way of pecuniary embarrassment, it did not obtrude itself upon any one's notice. The burden of that secret had been so long borne by the widow herself that it had ceased, except occasionally, to oppress her; she gathered her roses, such as they were, while she might, and, thankful to see her son so cheered by the presence of his cousin and her friend, and them so well pleased with his companionship, she took her share of the general contentment, and shut her eyes to the future. Blessed indeed is the constitution that permits its possessor so to do. To bear the ills of life with resignation and philosophy is doubtless good; but to be able to ignore their approach, although we have full knowledge of it, until they are actually at our door is a more enviable gift. It is not too much to say that one-half of the misery of human life consists in apprehension, of which at least one-fifth turns out to be groundless. Curiously enough, though Mrs. Meyrick herself trembled, as we have said, only occasionally at the menaces of Fate, and never shuddered and shrank from them as some would have done, Roger Leyden never forgot the evil days that were coming with such certainty, if not upon Matthew, at all events on his mother. It might have been—nay, it would have been—worse for her to have seen him harassed by penury, to feel that his poor maimed life lacked its comforts; but, though she had so far ventured to keep him in happy ignorance of their position, what an outlook, reflected the kind old archæologist, had the poor widow even as it was! The best that could happen was that her boy should die while the money lasted—i.e. at an early date; and then, bereft of the only being to whom she clung, there would remain for her an indefinite number of years to be passed in loneliness and penury.

Such considerations, I have noticed, so long as they affect others at least, are wont to influence persons of well-regulated and orthodox minds but little; they not only bear the misfortunes of their friends with resignation meet and meek, but accept them with such humility and acquiescence in the ways

of Providence as make themselves appear even more earnest and well-principled than they were to start with. These harsh notes, in short, just as the exception proves the rule, seem to their attuned and well-regulated ears to give assurance of the universal harmony.

But in some minds, not so happily constituted, the miseries, present or to come, of their fellow-creatures, and especially if they are dear to them, have a disquieting effect. They are not only moved—considering what (present company excepted) we all deserve—to undue consideration for the victim, but are led into impious doubt as to whether things in general happen in the world exactly as they should do, and with relation to desert. Whenever Roger Leyden thought of Mrs. Meyrick and her future—and he very often thought about it—his mind was apt to take this dangerous and deplorable direction.

On the next day but one after his introduction to the governess he spoke to her on the subject with great frankness and vehemence, and, it must be confessed, not without finding some response. From a person literally so well schooled as Miss Dart, one might have expected a reproof of such sentiments, if not a logical discourse, with arguments properly suited to the occasion; but, on the whole, she sympathised with him; and so curiously is human nature constituted that agreement of this kind will sometimes consolidate a friendship in a marvellously brief space of time, which many years of acquaintanceship, with the genteelest opportunities of cultivating it, will fail to establish. The proof of this in the present case was that Roger Leyden invited Miss Dart to inspect his private residence. Every Englishman's house is said to be his castle, but Mr. Leyden's house was not only a real castle, but was environed by all the difficulties of approach, and more, which the law feigns to provide. No one ever entered it without the owner's leave, and very few obtained that permission. He made an exception in favour of such persons as were attracted to the little town by its historic and archaeological interest, but of ordinary visitors he saw nothing. There was, indeed, little accommodation for such folk, and nothing to show them. The place was scrupulously clean, which, in the case of an antiquary's residence, was unusual; but it was ill provided even with the most ordinary furniture. The few rooms it contained were low and dark; the windows were small, and placed at such a distance from the rooms (on

account of the immense thickness of the walls) that to look through them was like looking through a telescope. The staircases, which were both of stone, were spiral, and led, the one to an open watch-tower, on which there was scarcely room for two people to stand; the other to Mr. Leyden's bed-chamber, where there was just room for him to lie at length with ten feet of stone all round him. In the centre of the Castle, which was half in ruins, was a sunk courtyard, full of spring flowers, which the sun scarcely ever reached, except at midday. In the summer, indeed, it was a blaze of colour, the warmth and brightness of which contrasted strangely with the rusty bars and paneless windows of the rooms on the same level, which had once been the Castle dungeons. If Roger Leyden had a weakness, he used to say (as though astrology and archæology were to be counted as strong points) it was for flowers that flourished in such old-world and gloomy places, where they seemed to shine like good deeds in a naughty world.

The chief apartment of the Castle was the central room, an octagon with a stone roof; and here, on an oak table, were spread various 'finds,' in the shape of ancient relics, which Roger had picked up in the neighbourhood. Each was carefully numbered, and bore a neat inscription setting forth the date and place of its discovery. The sacredness of this apartment (the only stone octagon in the county) and its contents had, in the eyes of their proprietor, no parallel in profane history; and woe to the visitor who fingered brass or bone in an irreverent spirit! Nay, woe even to the less sacrilegious who allowed his attention to be distracted from the records of the historic past while its owner was dilating on them! In such cases, the lecture would suddenly change its form and become a philippic.

The only person who was exempted from these severities was Mrs. Meyrick. On that good lady, clothed in the mail of good-natured indifference, the whole armoury of the past, from flint knives downwards, was powerless to make the least impression; and Roger had long given her up as incorrigible and contumacious, but without that desire to hand her over to the secular arm, to be burnt alive, which most fanatics feel under such circumstances: he only pitied her from the bottom of his kindly heart.

On the present occasion she had accompanied Miss Dart to the Castle from motives of propriety (Mary Melburn re-

maining at home to keep Matthew company), but had left her in charge of her host at the entrance of 'the museum,' as she persisted, to his horror, in calling it.

'I only worry Roger, my dear, with my ignorance about all these wonderful things,' she whispered. 'It's no use his explaining them to me, for what goes in at one ear goes out at the other; and I shall leave you to have your mind improved for a few minutes while I have a chat with old Rachel about her cream cheeses.'

Old Rachel was Mr. Leyden's sole domestic, and possessed the secret of making the delicacies in question to perfection; she had revealed it in confidence to many of her friends and neighbours, but, it was supposed, with some reservation, since in their hands the article never attained the same fulness of success as in her own. The matter, however, was so diplomatically managed that she still continued to maintain both her popularity and her reputation.

Mr. Roger Leyden's lecture was by no means so formidable an affair as his audience of one had been led to expect; it was sententious rather than diffusive, and mildly explanatory instead of being dogmatic, and, what was still more unexpected, his manner gave her the impression of his being pre-occupied with something else. Had a spectator been present, it is even probable that he would have pronounced the disciple to have been more interested in the matter on hand than the demonstrator himself. Miss Dart, who had never before seen a torque for example, was eloquent in her praise of the chaste and simple ornament. Her enthusiasm seemed to please him, but without arousing a kindred flame.

'You understand what is worthy of admiration,' he said, 'and express your appreciation becomingly. Most young ladies who see these things are seized with a desire to try them on. I feel about that something of what Walter Scott felt when the town councillor (or somebody) would have placed the old crown of Scotland on the head of a lady visitor. The attraction of this armlet in my eyes is that the last arm it rested on was probably that of some Saxon or even ancient Briton.'

'It is curious,' observed Miss Dart, 'that at this very day it is the custom, I hear, among the golden youth of London to wear torques, only they call them bangles.'

'Vanity has as rank a growth in the light soil as in the clay,' observed Mr. Leyden. 'Virgil tells us that the Trojans

wore these ornaments when they colonised Italy; they were common, too, among the Persians and the Gauls.'

'Moreover,' observed Miss Dart, 'a great portrait painter has left it on record that he found his sitters of the male sex at least as solicitous to be represented favourably as the ladies.'

'No doubt, no doubt,' returned the antiquary. 'Still, it is not every man who wishes to have his portrait taken, which can hardly be said of women. The torque, after all, was an exceptional distinction, whereas there is hardly a grave of any Roman lady without its speculum and tweezers.'

'No Roman remains, I suppose, have been found on Battle Hill?' observed Miss Dart, who, piqued, she knew not why, by her companion's reticence, was desirous to hear him discourse upon his favourite topic.

'Nothing has been found save these few coins of Egbert.'

'And do you suppose that they form a portion of some greater and undiscovered treasure?'

'Certainly not,' he answered confidently; 'they were dropped there by accident, just as you might lose a sixpence stooping in a strawberry bed.'

'There were no gold coins in Egbert's reign, I believe?'

'No; there was nothing made of gold but a few ornaments, and the crosses and vessels of the Church.'

He was regarding her with great attention, yet with a far-away look, like one who has his mind fixed both on the present and the future. 'Surely now,' she thought to herself, 'he is about to tell me of the treasure.' It was not that the subject had much attraction for her, save in connection with the man himself, who had awakened in her as great an interest in his way as Matthew Meyrick had in his. She felt as a painter feels who happens upon some rare and striking model, that he was no ordinary study in human nature.

'Miss Dart,' he said, with gravity, 'I think myself fortunate in having this opportunity of saying a few words to you in private; like Pilate's wife, I have had a dream about you which troubles me much.'

'A dream?—and about me?' she answered, smiling. 'If a dream, as I have read, is the consequence of having had its subject in our waking thoughts, I ought to feel complimented.'

He waved his hand as though to dismiss such trivialities as compliments from the matter under discussion.

‘I have thought of you much ever since I saw you first,’ he went on; ‘but that has naught to do with what I speak of. Elizabeth Dart, I have cast your horoscope, and the lord of the ascendant at your nativity I find to be the sun. That, to begin with, is a great matter, for against such fortunate persons the malefic influence of the stars avails but little.’

‘The stars in their courses hitherto, Mr. Leyden, have, nevertheless, fought against me and mine,’ she answered, quietly. She did not want to argue with him, but there was something in her nature which forbade her to humour even an innocent superstition; moreover, though her disposition was cheerful, she lived in no fool’s paradise. Her thoughts had wandered to a certain lonely lodging, where sat, after a life of honest toil, a gentle woman, troubled by rheumatism, waiting for an old age of poverty and pain.

‘I know it, I know it,’ he answered, confidently; ‘but it will not always be so. In this dream of mine I tell you I beheld the sun environed by the twelve signs, save Pisces, which was defective.’

‘Fish is a luxury, which accounts for it,’ thought Miss Dart.

‘Only the sun—now mark this—was nine times bigger than the true sun, which denotes a corresponding increase in your estate.’

‘That will give me a capital of 90*l.*,’ observed Miss Dart, smiling, ‘for I have just got 10*l.* which I can call my own.’

‘Peace, peace!’ he answered, reprovingly, and in solemn tones. ‘I tell you it is appointed that you will be immensely rich. Wealth will be no curse to you as it is to the majority of its possessors, for you will make good use of it; you will remember the widow and the orphan. . . . My dear Mrs. Meyrick,’ he broke off as that lady entered the room, ‘Miss Dart began to think you would never come; she is sick and tired of my antiquarian lore, and longs to be at home with Matthew and Mary.’

It was clear to Miss Dart that she had offended her singular host, and yet the apology she would have offered was difficult to make.

It would have been impossible for her to express belief in horoscopes or the auguries of dreams; moreover, it was plain from the old man’s words that he wished no reference to be made in the presence of a third person to the subject of their

conversation. 'I am very sorry to have shown myself such a sceptic, Mr. Leyden,' she murmured, as they shook hands.

'No matter, I am used to being discredited,' was his quiet rejoinder.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN EDITOR.

EVERYBODY, not in the first flight of fashion and ignorance, must remember the sensation caused by the first appearance of the 'Millennium Review'—nay, even fashionable people deigned to notice the existence of that phenomenon, when, after rising like a rocket through the literary empyrean to an unparalleled altitude, it remained there emitting showers of wit and fancy. It was published, of course, to supply an obvious void in literature; the wonder was that it found one and succeeded in filling it. Some one said that it was suggested by the well-known lament of the divine who enlarged the sphere of ecclesiastical harmonies, that 'the devil should have all the best tunes.' At all events, its declared object was to enlist under the banner of Orthodoxy certain talents, such as wit and humour, which had hitherto been retained by the other side. Only, from the nature of things, it was necessary that the Orthodox should be exceeding broad. From the High and Dry, therefore, this publication could look but for little sympathy, and still less from the Evangelical party. But between high-water mark and low-water mark opinions are plentiful as sand and various as shells, and it was to this section of the reading public that the 'Millennium' appealed. The editor of this new venture, one Felix Argand, was a man of character. His opinions within certain not very clearly defined limits were audacious, and he had the courage of his opinions. Contrary to the advice of his friends, he had invested all the money he had in the world in this literary speculation. In vain had they judiciously pointed out that the brain-worker and the wire-puller were *dramatis personæ* which should never be undertaken by the same individual; since, if once the grit of worry gets into the delicate wheels of intellect, there ensues disaster. Argand answered, 'I know it, but I must be entirely untrammelled in this affair, or I shall sink like a stone.'

They watched his proceedings with a smile of compassion, and—it seemed, with that ‘*Millennium*’ round his neck, like a miracle—they beheld him float. Success assured, at all events for the present, he became the prey of quite another set of advisers. For himself they cared nothing, but they were earnestly desirous to make use of his enterprise for the advocacy of their theories. ‘In some respects the principles of the “*Millennium*” were so admirable,’ they said; ‘what a pity it is you suffer it to fall short of perfection.’ The High Church party entreated him to become ‘a bulwark.’ A great and venerable authority offered to contribute an article upon the ‘*Translations of Bishops*.’

‘Dear and reverend sir,’ he replied, ‘you mistake the nature of the question that the public is putting to itself. It is not whether there shall be any more *Translations*, but any more *Originals*.’

The venerated (and titled) head of the Evangelical party besought him in moving terms to remember that philanthropic endeavour without dogmatic faith was only one of the million roads to the everlasting bonfire.

‘My lord,’ he replied, ‘I admire your philanthropic exertions beyond everything; but it seems to me that you have made a religion for yourself out of the worst parts of Theology.’

Felix Argand was one of the gentlest-natured men that ever took pen in hand; but he resented dictation, and had a habit of expressing himself epigrammatically. His personal appearance was striking: tall and thin, with flowing hair and eloquent brown eyes, he had the appearance of a religious enthusiast; but though ingenuous and frank to a fault, and cordial (where he liked people) in a remarkable degree, he was well acquainted with human nature; not easily deceived, and never deceived twice by the same arts; with a tongue smooth and gentle, but sharp on occasion like a razor, he held his own against all comers. Though his aim was nothing less than the regeneration of society, he entertained no false hopes of its accomplishment. To leave the world better than he found it was his highest expectation. His heart was tender towards all who were worthy of compassion; but cold as steel towards the base. The coquetting of the humanitarians with the cruel aroused his bitterest contempt; and servility and sycophancy his keenest ridicule. With Whig or Tory he had no sympathy; the utter independence of party politics exhibited by the ‘*Millennium*’ was one of its specialties;

and, though a spiritual tone pervaded it, it was wholly unsectarian.

Though Felix Argand had taken the highest honours at Oxford, he had derived no material advantage from them, since his peculiar principles had forbidden him to accept the terms on which alone a Fellowship could, at that time, be obtained. His reputation, however, had preceded him to town, where by that circle which still concerns itself with University matters, while it does its work in the larger literary world, he was warmly welcomed. With such exceptional advantages, his talents soon obtained recognition, if within a somewhat limited sphere ; and his pen gained him an income which, supplemented by some small private means of his own, was amply sufficient for his needs. This source of support, however, in a short time became precarious—not from any falling off in the value of his contributions, but from the views expressed in them. Editors complained that he was angular—a fatal bar to eminence in journalism ; and the application of the smoothing-iron was borne with impatience. His mind, though not, perhaps, very logical, was essentially original. Some said he was not ‘quiet in harness’ ; but others went further, and averred that he was not adapted either for riding or driving, but, like the wild horse of the Ukraines, fit only to rove at will, or at best, to take part in those Roman races which are run without saddle or bridle, with the spur of his own imagination pricking his sides.

Of course, he was pronounced unpractical ; and, indeed, he was so in the sense that he could find no groove to fit him ; but, with less reason, it was deplored that he was utterly ignorant of the world. Felix Argand, indeed, concerned himself not so much with the doings of the world as with its thinking ; but the latter he made his particular study, and became surprisingly familiar with it. He possessed an unusual share of human sympathy, and a manner that invited confidence. With the opinions of philosophers and sages mankind is well acquainted, for they can be read in books ; but with the views of our own friends and neighbours, regarding matters that are out of the sphere of their everyday existence, we rarely think it worth our while to inquire. Teachers and preachers imagine that in providing them with doctrine they have inspired conviction and supplied them with faith. Felix Argand had the intelligence to perceive that this was not the case. He learnt that among a large minority of ordinary

thinkers the great principles of Belief survive in the ashes of Dogma; the 'Millennium' was addressed to readers as far removed from Orthodoxy as from Agnosticism, and found its public. The success accomplished was great and immediate; but its peculiarity lay in its personal character. The originator of this enterprise, who had been hitherto only a moderately well-known figure in London life, became a personage and a power. He was still young, which increased the marvel; and even younger in heart than in years. He sympathised with the youthful doubter, with the budding poet, with the thinker who had just burst the shell; he read every contribution, or some part of it, with his own eye; it is not surprising, therefore, that as his good-nature got to be understood his correspondence became considerable; and yet it was said that he never left a letter unanswered.

Of course, he was immensely laughed at. Editors of a more practical kind did not hesitate to aver that he had a bee in his bonnet, though they acknowledged that it was a working bee. Such unparalleled amenity could only be explained by a hankering after popularity, and what made his conduct still more reprehensible was that he gained his end. Such dereliction from professional practice it was, however, a comfort to think must bring its own punishment. Like the lady who betrayed the city and was smothered with bracelets, he must presently be consumed by the gratitude of his correspondents, and it did in fact consume some hours daily of his precious time.

Of Felix Argand, even Elizabeth Dart, in the land of the Philistines, had dimly heard; but only once had she held in her hand a copy of the 'Millennium'; it was not a sort of periodical to be found in a lady's school, or lying on the drawing-room table of a house like Burrow Hall; and it cost five shillings. This was in her case a prohibitive price. Still, she had seen it, had turned over the leaves of an old number exposed on a bookstall, and wished that she had a shilling to spare with which to purchase it. But the Court of Chancery within her, in the shape of Conscience, had sternly decided that the 'Millennium' was not a necessary, but a luxury. She understood the nature of the publication in a vague and imperfect way, much as she had learnt that of its editor, and she entertained a sincere admiration for them both.

Once or twice, indeed, of late years, when stirred by a certain yearning which has been hinted at, she had taken her courage in both hands and sat down to address this unknown

friend to whose attention the love of literature was said to be a password, but the letter had never been sent. The very fact that his door was so frequently on its hinge to all applicants had deterred her. It was not vanity and egotism after all which, under pretence of modesty, impelled her to join the throng. But now, when the matter was no longer a personal one, and this friendly hand might be of some service to another, she had no such scruple in entreating its guidance. She resolved to apply to Felix Argand on behalf of Matthew Meyrick.

Her pen, though as well practised in private as a two-year-old racer, was not so fast; it could hardly be called that of a ready writer; though far from fastidious, she was never content with a good word when a better seemed wanting; and she shrank, above all things, from inflicting her tediousness upon any correspondent. In this case it was essential to be brief, and yet there was so much to say. As to her own judgment of Matthew's talent, she put it aside as though it were worthless; she enclosed two of his poems, the one he had given her, and 'The Children' (of which she obtained a copy from Mary without, however, revealing the use to which she intended to put it), and let them speak for themselves. But she described in a few touching lines the circumstances of the poet, his youth, his poverty, his incurable disease, and the happiness which encouragement from the hand to which she was appealing would confer upon him; above all things, she pleaded for the truth: if he thought there was a real promise in the young man's productions, she entreated him to say so. There were no compliments (though she might conscientiously have used compliments) save that implied in her confidence of getting a reply. Being, for a woman, exceptionally reasonable, she did not expect an answer for some days. She received one, however, at the end of forty-eight hours, in a hand perfectly legible, but which gave the impression of its having run away with the writer.

'Dear Madam,' it ran—

'The specimens you have sent me of your young friend's muse are full of promise, and even give some performance. I return the MSS. by another post, lest the sight of them, as implying rejection, should unnecessarily disappoint you. The fact is, though there is no bar to the admission of verse into its columns, the "Millennium" has as yet printed none, and

"The Children" is hardly of sufficient merit to lead the van. On the other hand, I thought so highly both of it and its companion-poem that I offered them to my friend the editor of the "Parthenon," and he has accepted both. One, "On an Old Harpsichord," will appear in the next number of his magazine, and here it is in type. I know from experience that there is nothing like seeing himself in print for encouraging a young author, and I hope this will have the happy effect on your protégé which you seem to expect. On the other hand, I need scarcely tell you that his hopes must not be raised too high. His circumstances and opportunities, we must remember, though disadvantageous enough from a practical point of view, have in reality been propitious to the development of this particular talent of verse-making. His music is but the echo of the strains of others, and this present poem would never have been written had not Locker sung before him. Nevertheless, whosoever fails to recognise its merits is incapable of judging such matters. You must allow me to add that whatever sympathy I feel for this young man is far exceeded by the interest which has been excited in me by the letter of his introducer. I say nothing of the tenderness and good feeling which prompted it—for editors, you know, have nothing to do with sentiment. I am referring solely to the perfection of its composition, which does you, madam, something beyond credit,

'The modest silence you maintain upon your own affairs makes it somewhat difficult for me to address you upon the subject, but I wish to say that if you have yourself any desire to join the army of Captain Pen, the "Millennium" would be willing at least to favourably consider the application of such a recruit. At all events, I forward the six last numbers of the review for your guidance in such a case.

'I am, madam, yours sincerely,
'FELIX ARGAND.'

As Elizabeth Dart read this letter, her limbs trembled, her face grew pale, and her whole being experienced a shock of delight. It was as if a door had suddenly opened to her into a heaven of which she had often dreamt, but which she had had no expectation of entering. It seemed to her that this man had read her very soul. The next moment she blushed with shame at her own involuntary but unaccustomed egotism. What ought to have given her most pleasure was

surely not the encouragement addressed to herself, but to Matthew. What delight—nay, what benefit—would such gracious praise afford him! How enchanted would he be to see his verses in the ‘Parthenon,’ where only poems of exceptional merit were, she knew, admitted! How kind it was of Mr. Argand to have caused a proof to be struck for him! How much better the little poem read in print than it had done in manuscript!

ON AN OLD HARPSICHORD.

Its varnish cracked, its paintings scarred,
 Its dainty gilding sadly marred,
 And turned to dingy umber,
 It stands forlorn, a waif or stray
 Of glories long since passed away—
 An ancient piece of lumber.

What more? And yet how rich it is,
 This harpsichord in memories
 And quaint associations,
 Recalling that far time, when still
 High birth and title had their will,
 And kings were more than nations.

When gallants wore the true grand air—
 And wigs by half a morning’s care
 Made wondrous smooth and sheeny—
 And, while the perfumed pinch they took,
 Lisped languid rhapsodies on Gluck
 Or may be on Piccini.

I touch the keys—the startled chord
 Can scarce a weak response afford,
 That wakes a low vibration
 Among the slackened palsied strings:
 A feeble spell, and yet it brings
 A magic transformation.

An antique aspect veils the place—
 A weird, oppressive, ghostly grace
 That almost makes one tremble;
 A mystic light pervades the air,
 Faint footfalls gather on the stair,
 The belles and beaux assemble.

The belles and beaux? Alas, the ghosts,
 Thin shadows of once reigning toasts,
 And heroes of the duel.
 They smile, they chatter, they parade,
 They rustle in superb brocade,
 They shine with many a jewel.

They flirt their fans with pretty airs,
 They tap their precious *tabatières*,
 They smooth their ruffles grandly;
 While here and there an exquisite
 Lets fall his studied stroke of wit,
 And waits for plaudits blandly.

The harpsichord is quavering soon
 A minuet's slow triplet tune :
 A courtly powdered couple,
 All formal graces, bend and slide
 With curtsies marvellously wide,
 And bows politely supple.

The tune is changed : with graceful ease
 Fair spirit fingers sweep the keys,
 A spirit voice is trilling ;
 The passionate 'Che faro ?' strain
 Comes like a half-heard cry of pain
 From some far distance thrilling.

The lights go out ; the voices die ;
 Among the strings strange tremors fly,
 That slowly sink to slumber :
 The harpsichord remains alone,
 A monument of glories done—
 An ancient piece of lumber.

It was an echo, no doubt ; but it was also full of echoes of that picturesque past which it was intended to portray. And then the writer was but a boy. For the moment she pictured to herself the intense pleasure she would have in showing him his first-born in its robe of print ; but only for a moment. There was one who would have a still greater pleasure in so doing, and to her she would delegate that grateful task : Mary Melburn should be the messenger of this good tidings.

CHAPTER XX.

GOOD NEWS.

THE connection between our physical and spiritual natures is not yet understood, or tonics would not so often be prescribed for the dispirited. A piece of good news is often more beneficial to the invalid than all the steel and iron in the chemist's shop. If this truth were accepted, it is possible that cheer-

fulness and kindness would more commonly enter into the treatment of those volunteer physicians of the human race who, to judge by their teaching, know no other specific for our woes than the patience to bear them; if it were not, indeed, more easy to preach philosophy than to offer comfort, and especially so infinitely cheaper, it would be surprising that so obvious a remedy should be neglected. Could Felix Argand have been aware of the pleasure his letter and its contents diffused at the Look-out, he would have thought it worth his while—for to see others happy was a great enjoyment to him—to have journeyed thither to witness it. It pervaded the whole atmosphere of life there like a perfume.

First, as we have seen, it transported Elizabeth Dart to the seventh heaven, realising—or bringing within measurable distance of realisation—what had hitherto been but a dream, making the merely possible probable, and giving wings to hope. Very exaggerated sentiments, it may be thought, to arise in any woman from so slight a cause. Yet to some natures the opportunity of telling their thoughts to the world is at least as attractive as that of shutting themselves out from it in monasteries and nunneries is to others. The impulse is an exceptional one in both cases—much more so in the former than in the latter—but when it exists it is very powerful. Sooner or later the swollen tarn will find, of course, a way for itself; but in its mountain home, afar from stream and river, it lies ignorant of this law of its being, and welcomes the first outlet with exuberant joy. At the same time, nothing could be more foreign to the character of Elizabeth Dart than that desire of rushing into print which, so far from being an exceptional impulse, is nowadays the most common form of vanity. That enterprise, undertaken commonly with so light a heart, and solely or chiefly with the idea of personal gratification, was invested in her eyes with a certain solemnity and a sense of responsibility at which, perhaps, Mr. Felix Argand himself would have smiled. She felt none of that eagerness for immediate action which seizes upon most aspirants for literary fame under similar circumstances. She was well content to wait as before; but not, as before, without reason for the hope—nay, the faith—that was within her. She was like one who, having once become assured of her lover's affection, is in no hurry for its fruition, but is satisfied with 'a long engagement.' It behoved her now to consider whether the thoughts that had so often blossomed

in her mind, and some of which she had, with more or less of adequacy, set down on paper, would bear transplanting and the open air. Upon the whole, her happiness, though great, was very sober and subdued.

The reception of her good news by Mary—to whom, however, she had only shown so much of Mr. Argand's letter as referred to Matthew—was of a very different character.

'How very, very, very good of you it was, dear Lizzie!' she cried, with sparkling eyes, 'and how like you, to have thought of writing to Mr. What's-his-name about dear Mat! And how delighted he will be! How I should like to see his face when he first sees his beautiful poem in print!'

'You will certainly have that gratification, since it is you who shall show it to him.'

'Oh, Lizzie, that would not be fair!' she murmured hesitatingly; 'it is you who have done it all. I am much too stupid to have thought of such a thing, and much too frightened of editors to have dared to do it, even if I had thought of it. I wish I was clever and courageous like you. I wish—oh, how I wish—it was I who had done this for Matthew!'

The tears came into Mary's eyes as she uttered this aspiration.

'Lizzie,' she added, gravely, 'you are much more worthy of him than I am.'

The governess laughed aloud, and executed an elaborate curtsey.

'I am well aware, my dear,' she said, 'that you have paid me the highest compliment that it is in your power to bestow; do not, however, work yourself into a state of jealousy, for which, I do assure you, there is no ground. What, I suppose, we both desire is to give your cousin as much pleasure from this occurrence as possible; and as it is quite clear that good news from your lips would be much better news to him than from mine, from yours it must come.'

Then the two girls made a confidante of Mrs. Meyrick. She was not a lady much given to literature; but next to David—who possessed, however, an unfair advantage in being inspired—she had always believed in Matthew as the greatest poet that ever lived. When she saw his verses in print, she was quite sure of this. Under these circumstances, it was creditable that she did not ascribe his success entirely to his own merits.

'You are a dear girl, Miss Dart,' she said, embracing her;

‘most people who had screwed their courage up to make such an application to a stranger would have done so on their own account, and not for a poor crippled boy.’

‘I never thought of that,’ said Mary, penitently.

‘But I had no poem to send,’ observed Miss Dart, smiling.

‘You might have written one, if you had thought of it,’ asserted Mrs. Meyrick, confidently, as though a poem was a postscript.

It was amazing how small a circumstance had made these three women happy, and also made one of them so dear to the others.

Presently Mary tripped into the pavilion, where Matthew, as usual, when it was not ‘the children’s morning,’ was polishing up a poem.

‘I am coming to interrupt you,’ was her audacious observation.

He put his pen aside with a pleasant smile, and answered gallantly, ‘I wish life were made up of such interruptions.’

‘I dare say you do. But I have brought you a present.’

‘A present?’

‘Yes; you must guess what it is. What is it you would like best in all the world?’

He gazed at her bright face and sparkling eyes with wonder.

‘That is a very large order,’ he answered, playfully. ‘I am not sure that just now I have it in stock.’

‘Think, think,’ she went on, with eager excitement; ‘what is it that is most often in your mind? What is the dream of your life, which you, nevertheless, have been convinced would never be accomplished?’

He shook his head, but not like one who gives up a riddle; there was a piteous yearning in his face which told what he would like best only too well, since it was plain that he would never get it. Mary was sobered in a moment.

‘Why, Matthew, how dense you are!’ she exclaimed, in a changed voice. ‘Is it not fame that you are always thinking about?—and here it is, or at least the beginning of it,’ and she held out the printed poem. The colour rushed to the young author’s cheeks.

‘What is this? How comes this about?’

‘Through dear Lizzie Dart. You gave her the MS., you know, and she sent it to some friend in London, who has put it into the “Parthenon”; is it not kind of her?’

'It is more than kind ; but she told me that she had no literary friends.'

'True, I am doing her less than justice. It was to a stranger, a Mr. Argand, that she wrote, pointing out how beautiful your poems were, only that you were too modest to think them worth printing ; in which you see she was quite right. She will tell you all about it presently, only she thought it would give you greater pleasure because I am your cousin, and—and—so on, to hear the first news from me.'

'In which, again, as you say, she was quite right,' said Matthew, earnestly.

'And don't they look nice in print, Mat ; and are you not pleased ?' inquired Mary, hurriedly.

'Yes, yes ; I should be ungrateful indeed,' he murmured ; then added, inconsequently, 'we cannot expect to get everything we want in this world.'

'Not at first, of course not ; but, as Lizzie says, now that you have once got your foot in, it will be your own fault if you do not keep the door open ; and the "Parthenon" is such a high-class paper.'

From the bottom of her heart did Mary wish that her good news had been intrusted to a more discreet messenger than herself. If it had been Lizzie, or indeed anybody else, Matthew would have thought only of the verses ; but those unfortunate words she had used, 'What would you like best in all the world ?' had drawn his mind away to another subject, which, though well understood by both, it had been tacitly agreed between them should never be alluded to. She would always love him with a love far beyond that of a sister ; but brother and sister they needs must be. How deplorable it was that he should thus permit himself to repine at the inevitable ! It was surely much harder for her, since in all probability she would outlive him ; and now to bewail his loss, to ignore the relations that existed between them—how cruel as well as foolish it was in him ! But no ; his lot, after all, was harder than hers, and her heart smote her for the unuttered reproach. As he turned slowly on his crutch to the window, and looked out in silence on the grey and gloomy sea, it was an immense relief to her that when he spoke again it was upon the matter in hand.

'I have heard something of this Mr. Argand' he said ; 'he is said to take an exceptional interest in young writers.'

'But only, I suppose, when he sees there is something in

them. I don't see why you should depreciate yourself in that way.'

'I am not, for a wonder, thinking of myself just now at all, Mary. I am thinking of Mr. Argand and Miss Dart. Here are two people who have gone out of their way—Miss Dart a great deal out of her way, for it must have cost her much to address him, a total stranger—to do another a great kindness, and here am I, a selfish cripple, doing nothing for others, and always bemoaning myself.'

'Mat, be silent,' interrupted the girl, vehemently. 'I will not listen to you. You shall not say such things.'

'Nevertheless, they are true, my dear. Perhaps, if through this opportunity I should get something to do, matters may mend with me in this respect. In that case, it will be hard to overrate the benefit it will confer upon me.'

The reflection was wise, but unwholesome, because unnatural. Such self-consciousness in one so young could hardly have arisen in a healthy mind. 'And I tell you what, dear,' he continued, gravely, 'there is some one here who has found this out. Some one who is vastly superior to me, though I have been used to think so highly of my own talents.'

'That is ridiculous; mere mock modesty, Mat,' put in Mary, confidently. 'Mr. Leyden is very clever in his way, but his wits are not within miles of yours.'

'I am not by any means sure of that; but I am not thinking of Roger, I am speaking of Miss Dart. I believe she knows me, Mary, as thoroughly as you do; and even better in some ways. Under pretence of hearing other people's ideas, she suggests them, and reads their characters like a book. Now, if Mr. Argand could get *her* to write for him, it is my conviction he would draw a prize.'

'That's just what your mother says,' replied Mary, laughing; 'and I am sure Lizzie is very talented, and all that, but she is very weak in some things in which, as I am sure, no really very clever woman could be.'

'In what things?'

'Well, I am not quite at liberty to say; but mamma, who has sharp eyes for such matters, you know, is quite of my opinion. In particular, I think you are wrong about Miss Dart being a judge of character.'

'Indeed,' said Matthew, thoughtfully. 'Now that surprises

me very much. I mean your mother's having expressed such an opinion of Miss Dart.'

'You think she is wrong?' said Mary, smiling.

'I am sure she is wrong.'

'Well, time will show. If it shows you are right, so much the better. We shall not grudge you your superior wisdom. Good Heavens! there is Jefferson.'

In truth, at that moment there appeared on the steps leading from the parlour, side by side with Mrs. Meyrick, the Major himself.

'I can't see him, I can't see him,' exclaimed Matthew, vehemently. 'I am not well enough this morning to see anybody.'

'And you want a nurse,' said Mary, gravely. 'I don't think I should be justified in leaving you for any length of time—say, more than five minutes.'

'I suppose he will stay to luncheon,' sighed Matthew.

'Your mother, of course, will have to ask him to do so. Here are we plotting to evade an unwelcome visitor with never a thought for the poor hostess, for whom there is no escape.'

'Immediately, too, after one of us has made a solemn vow to abjure selfishness and lead a new life,' added Matthew, penitently. 'However, as one must stop somewhere, I suppose, even in a career of perfection, it is surely permissible to draw the line at Jefferson. But I do pity the dear mother.'

'Perhaps she will find somebody to take him off her hands,' said Mary, drily.

'What, Roger? Never! He detests him even more than—I mean he has no better opinion of him than we have.'

'No, not Roger. Look yonder.'

The Major, standing on the top step, had suddenly wheeled round, and, with beaming smile, extended his hand to Miss Dart, whose face reflected the pleasure in his own.

'Great Heavens!' ejaculated Matthew. 'Do you really mean to say she likes him!'

'Most certainly she does; that is what makes me a little doubtful of her intuition. At first it made mamma doubtful of Lizzie; but it is only because she is hoodwinked and infatuated.'

'It is impossible!' ejaculated Matthew.

'It is not only possible, but it is the case,' answered Mary, earnestly. 'Nor is it really to be wondered at. It is

difficult for you and me to regard the matter from poor Lizzie's point of view. He has made himself exceedingly agreeable ever since she came to us; and he can be very agreeable when he pleases; and, indeed, I really believe, so far as he is capable of affection for any one but himself, he is actually in love with her.'

'But that makes it so much worse, I mean for her,' exclaimed Matthew, mournfully. 'It is shameful; it is cruel; why have you not opened her eyes to his real character?'

'How little you know of our sex!' replied Mary, gently. 'That would be the very way to strengthen his position with her. Once or twice I have ventured to throw out a hint to her in the most delicate manner, but she has instantly darted away from the subject like a fish who sees the line in the sunshine. Don't think me hard on dear Lizzie, Mat, for I like her as much as you do; except for this, there is the most perfect confidence between us; but indeed, indeed, she must find Jefferson out for herself.'

CHAPTER XXI.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

EVENTS, like misfortunes, seldom come singly. The course of human life is that of a ship; most of it is passed on the wide ocean without a sail in sight, or an occurrence by which to mark a day. The storm and the leak and the wreck commonly come together, and the fair islands, at which we gladly touch, in clusters.

The letter from Mr. Argand formed an epoch in Elizabeth Dart's existence, and, indeed, promised to change the course of it. Such an incident might well have seemed sufficient to vary 'the level waste of rounded grey' that formed her life for many days to come, yet on the very morning on which it happened occurred Major Melburn's visit, an event much less unexpected but not inferior to it in interest.

She had come down from her room intending to join Mary in the pavilion and to offer her congratulations to Matthew, when, on entering the dining-room, she saw Mrs. Meyrick standing at the open window with, as she thought, a stranger. But the Major, being on the look-out for her,

had quicker eyes, and, before she could withdraw, addressed her. She felt the colour fly to her cheek as she returned his greeting, and her heart gave a flutter of joy. How handsome and pleasant he looked, and, in comparison with his hostess, as she could not help remarking, how completely at his ease. That Mrs. Meyrick and Matthew did not like him she had guessed from the silence they maintained about him ; in their case, since they were his blood relations, it was less explicable than in the case of Mrs. Melburn and her daughter, but doubtless they had espoused the latter's cause. But if the Major had been Mrs. Meyrick's favourite nephew he could not have appeared more at home with her. This complete self-possession, which Miss Dart had noticed more than once, and under much more trying circumstances, had always excited her admiration.

She herself was by no means without self-command, but she knew her difficulties in maintaining it ; her nature was, indeed, exceedingly emotional, and such delicate organisations are attracted by their opposites as the needle by the iron. There could be no question, indeed, as to the attractive qualities of Major Melburn generally. Not even those most prejudiced against him could affect to wonder what any woman could see in him to admire. He was not only good-looking, which always goes for something with the female sex, though for not so much as with the male, but distinguished-looking. His air and manner were striking, and gave that suggestion of reserve force which it is so easy for those who are its possessors to exaggerate and magnify. Without giving the least impression of effort, he always seemed superior to his company. His store of information was in truth but scanty, yet he husbanded it and used it with such effect at the right moment that it seemed ample. Of books, indeed, he professed to know but little—a very small blemish in Miss Dart's eyes, who had had some reason to doubt the excellences of mere learning ; but he exhibited a knowledge of life she the more admired, since it produced apparently an indifference to position and degree. It was to that, quite as much as to kindness of heart, that she set down his friendly behaviour to herself, and the equal footing on which he had placed her from the first. Her natural astuteness was not indeed blunted, but, as it were, sheathed, when she endeavoured to regard him critically, and even this was very seldom, for his friendly way disarmed her. Though dimly conscious of her own talents,

she was free from personal vanity, and utterly unaccustomed to the attentions of the other sex. It never entered her mind that Major Melburn had been first attracted to her by her beauty, and that all 'other graces had followed in their proper places,' which, in his table of precedence, stood far below it.

It was one of those cases, rare in love affairs, where lookers-on see more of the game than the players, or, at all events, than one of them: and it was certainly no idle boast of Mary Melburn's that if she had pleased, or rather, if it had been judicious to do so, she could have opened her friend's eyes. It must be admitted, however, that Mary had known the Major's game for many years.

'Have you any news from Mrs. Melburn?' inquired Miss Dart, a question which of itself betrayed the confusion of mind which his visit had produced in her; for if she had had the power to think, and had not been moved merely by the desire to say something objective and apart from her own concerns, she would have known that he was the last person likely to be informed on such a matter. It was characteristic in him that instead of evading the inquiry he met it point blank.

'Well, the fact is,' he answered, smiling, 'my stepmother and I are not very constant correspondents; I don't think, in fact, she has ever favoured me with a note in my life; and, as to the governor, his letters from abroad have all been addressed to the bailiff. You know his ways, Mrs. Meyrick; he is always afraid of his land running away in his absence, though indeed that phenomenon is sometimes known to take place under the very eyes of its proprietor,' concluded the Major, cheerfully.

'Christopher always liked to look after things himself,' observed Mrs. Meyrick, apologetically. 'He has such a pride in the estate, because it has been in the family so long.'

'It is a pity it does not increase in value with time, like wine,' observed the Major, drily. 'All the landlords are being ruined, you know, Mrs. Meyrick.'

His tone was mildly explanatory, like that of a grown-up person addressing a child; it was certainly not unkind, yet it seemed to affect the widow as though she had received a reproof.

'I do not doubt it, indeed, Jefferson,' she replied. 'Nevertheless, hard times are never so hard for the rich as for the poor.'

'I am not so sure of that,' he mused. 'Poor people grow callous to their trouble, like the hand of toil.'

'Like the much-smitten back to stripes,' you should rather say,' put in Miss Dart, quickly. 'They are not to be less pitied, surely, because unmerited disaster pursues them with persistence.'

'Certainly not,' admitted the Major, gently. 'I only meant in a vague way that sometimes the wind is tempered to the shorn lamb. Perhaps it isn't; it may be that it is only selfishness which causes us to minimise the troubles we do not share, or share in less degree.'

He looked so penitent that Miss Dart quite repented of her sharp rejoinder. If the Major was a little thoughtless, or at times exhibited too much of the harshness of the soldier, he always came to the right conclusion on reflection. If this change seemed to be effected by a gentle reminder from herself, it was not the less gratifying to her; but the same result would, doubtless, have been attained had any one else taken the trouble to question his views. As it happened, no one did take the trouble; his position was, unfortunately, an isolated one; and, indeed, it really seemed that no one understood him, or appreciated what was good in him, except herself. It was not vanity that caused her to arrive at this conclusion, but the testimony of his own words.

'I dare say I am an unsatisfactory individual,' he had once said to her; 'but it must be owned that there has not been much patience wasted on me at home.' Miss Dart admitted to herself that the Major was not wholly satisfactory; but she thought he might have been made so by more kind and judicious treatment, and pitied him. Though no one, as she had told him, had breathed a word against him to her, it was plain that he was a favourite with none of the family, either at Burrow Hall or at the Look-out. 'Where is Mary?' he inquired, presently, of his hostess.

'She is in the pavilion, with Matthew. I am not certain that he is well enough to-day to see a visitor.'

The tremulousness of poor Mrs. Meyrick's tone was touching. It was plain that her simple nature was very ill-qualified for deception; but Matthew did so dislike Jefferson, and it was so important that the invalid should not be irritated or distressed. Her embarrassment, however, did not at the moment attract Miss Dart's attention so much as the laconic and unsympathetic character of her reply. Mrs. Meyrick, she

knew, was incapable of hardness in the ordinary sense; and yet it was hard, when a brother asked after a sister, whom presumably, too, he had come over expressly to see, for her, in indirect but still unmistakable terms, to be denied him. The Major smiled, with a half glance at the governess, which seemed to say, 'You see how they treat me,' and answered, quietly, 'I was in hopes she might be induced to take a turn with me on the pier.'

'You will see her at luncheon, you know,' said Mrs. Meyrick, doubtfully.

'I cannot stay for luncheon,' was his dry rejoinder; 'and, besides, I wanted to say a few words to her in private. Perhaps you would kindly tell her that?'

Mrs. Meyrick assented by a nod, and at once went off to the pavilion; but with a look that by no means boded hopefully for the success of her mission.

'It is charming to find oneself so beloved by one's family, is it not, Miss Dart?' said the Major, laughing, as soon as they were left alone.

'If I thought what I conclude you mean,' she answered, gravely, 'I should think it no laughing matter.'

'But, then, I am used to be snubbed. When I remarked, just now, that the experience of calamity produced philosophy, I was severely reproved for it; but there is really something in it.'

'I have no doubt your sister will come out with you,' said Miss Dart, 'or, at all events, give you that opportunity of speaking to her which you desire.'

There was a scholastic ring in the sentence, always observable in Miss Dart's utterances when they were of an artificial kind. She had not quite the confidence in Mary's acquiescence which she had expressed; but it seemed so necessary to say something conciliatory and calculated to make matters less unpleasant.

'You are very sanguine,' he answered, quietly. 'I know all these good people better than you do. It does not seem much to ask, it is true; but you will see that it is too much.'

'Let us hope not.'

'By all means. If, however, my view turns out to be the correct one, may I venture to ask the same favour of yourself—namely, five minutes' private conversation? What I have to say to Mary,' he went on, hurriedly, perceiving his companion looked embarrassed, 'can be said to her with equal

force by a third person ; but it is most important that it should be said. Mrs. Meyrick is coming back to us. If the reply is "Nay," will you be at the pier-head in twenty minutes or so ?—it is the only means I have of getting speech with you.'

If he had proposed a meeting on their own account, it was probable Miss Dart would have declined it, though she had as little of the prude about her as of the flirt, but she could hardly refuse to act as intermediary between Mary and himself ; even if he had exaggerated the importance of what he had to say, she might still, in declining to hear it, be throwing away the chance of reuniting brother and sister, or at least of bringing them to a better understanding of one another.

It was easy to read on Mrs. Meyrick's face that the Major had been a true prophet, before she faltered forth how grieved she was to say 'that it was one of dear Matthew's bad mornings, and that Mary could not be persuaded to leave him.'

'I am sorry,' said the Major, quietly. 'I wish that I could add that I am disappointed. Save for the pleasure of seeing you, Aunt Louisa, it seems that I have had my ride for nothing.'

'It is most unfortunate,' murmured poor Mrs. Meyrick. 'You will surely, however, have some lunch ?'

'Thank you ; no. I have a friend stopping with me at home, whom I ought not to desert longer than is absolutely necessary.'

His hostess did not press the matter ; she even unconsciously uttered a sigh of relief. As the Major took Miss Dart's hand, he said, in a low voice, 'You will not fail me ?' His face looked so eager and so tender (as she had seen it only once before) as he bent over her, that she half repented of the promise she had given him ; nevertheless, she answered, 'I will come.'

CHAPTER XXII.

ON THE PIER.

It is universally admitted when the time seems to have arrived, through misfortune or evil report, for one's friends to 'rally round one,' that, as a rule, they do not rally. Nevertheless, that is the occasion that a woman who entertains a

tenderness for a man always seizes to show it. She is not content with holding herself apart from those who traduce him, or declining to listen to their insinuations, but she runs up to him as she never did before, and placing her hand in his, in sign, not of love, as she flatters herself, but of friendship, exclaims, 'I do not believe one word of what these people say.'

The refusal of Mary Melburn to give her brother an interview, though not unintelligible to Miss Dart, seemed very inexcusable, while the whole character of his reception at the Look-out struck her as cold and cruel. Like most persons who have not mixed much with the world, or had the opportunity of contracting friendship, the ties of blood had, in her eyes, an exaggerated importance. The only person who was related to her was also her best friend; the circumstance seemed only natural and in accordance with the fitness of things; and that Mrs. Meyrick should have received her nephew with such manifest want of cordiality, and that his sister should have point-blank refused to see him at all, was absolutely shocking to her. Indignation at their conduct evoked in her a strong sympathy as well as compassion for the victim, and, as she was only too conscious, at the same time intensified her feeling of personal regard for him. That we are ignorant of our characters is a maxim sufficiently flavoured with paradox, but that we should be ignorant of our own motives is almost a contradiction in terms.

Nevertheless, it was without the least sense of doing anything clandestine, or contrary to maidenly propriety, that Elizabeth Dart took her way to the little pier. The very dependence of her position gave her an independence of action, and what would have been little short of audacious in the girl was only a bold step in the governess.

The pier at Casterton was by no means one of those elaborate erections to which the visitors at our fashionable seaside resorts are so accustomed; it had no spacious promenade with its concert-room, or at least its pavilion for the band, no shields of glass to let in the light and exclude the wind, no light and elegant roof to keep off the sun or rain. It was short and thick and ugly, built of solid stone, and furnished with a rough bench or two, which those who were so fortunate as to secure dragged hither and thither, into coigns of vantage according to the direction of the wind.

On one of these she found the Major sitting with his

umbrella up, for rain drops were falling ; and it was only natural she should partake of its shelter, a simple arrangement which gives the impression of isolation to the persons concerned. The ostrich with his head in the sand derives, no doubt, a similar satisfaction from his seclusion, however partial or inadequate. It must be added, however, that while the female bird on this occasion seemed to entertain no apprehension, the male bird occasionally popped his head out and kept a sharp look-out on passers-by.

‘How kind of you it is, Miss Dart,’ he murmured tenderly, ‘to give me this opportunity of speaking to you.’

‘It is only my duty, Major Melburn, to do so,’ was her reply. ‘If what you have to say concerns your sister so nearly, she ought to be informed of it.’

This rejoinder did not seem to please her companion, though there was a certain unnecessary quiet and deliberation in its tone which belied its words. When we have no suspicion of danger we do not put on our armour.

‘You are very good to take such an interest in her,’ he answered, gently. ‘I venture to believe that it extends more or less to all of us. Under ordinary circumstances, and considering the short time you have been with us, it would be impossible to repose the confidence in you which I am about to show ; but somehow—I hardly know how, though I feel it—you have won the right to learn everything from my lips that concerns ourselves.’

Miss Dart moved her head in tacit acknowledgment of the compliment ; perhaps she was a little mistrustful of having her voice completely under control.

‘I am sure,’ he went on, ‘that you will treat whatever I say as confidential, and that, however much you may differ from me as to the course of conduct Mary should pursue, you will give me credit for good intentions.’

‘You may take so much for granted, Major Melburn.’

‘Now, I dare say you think, from our mode of life at Burrow Hall, that we are rich people ? Well, that is not the case. The estate is encumbered, and my father is in pecuniary straits.’

‘I am both sorry and surprised to hear it.’

‘I knew you would be ; the matter does not concern me so much, because I have some money of my own from my mother, and, of course, my pay ; but the fact is, that on my father’s death—and perhaps before, for one cannot keep up

appearances for ever—Mary will be very ill-off indeed. You know what sort of man my father is—as proud as Lucifer, and very reserved about his own affairs. She therefore suspects nothing of this. I think it unfair to her; but still, I am not justified in revealing to her what he has thought proper to conceal. It was my intention, however, if she had given me the opportunity, to hint at the true state of affairs. You will know, Miss Dart, better than I whether Mary is qualified, in case things come to the worst, to gain her own living, as you yourself do, for example.’

‘What! As a governess? You don’t mean to tell me things will be as bad as that?’

Miss Dart was greatly disturbed, and sat with down-drooped eyes reflecting on the evil tidings. At the sound of an approaching footstep the Major’s head emerged from its shelter like that of a turtle from its shell; a shambling figure in an ulster was making his way up the little pier against the wind and rain. As he neared them, he caught sight of the Major’s face, which was full of discouragement and menace. The new-comer was about to speak, but such fury flashed from the other’s eyes that he altered his purpose, and with a shrug of his shoulders turned upon his heel and retraced his steps. The Major drew a breath of relief which, to judge by his countenance, was, however, unmixed with thankfulness, and rejoined his companion in her silken bower.

‘I gather from your tone, my dear Miss Dart,’ he said, ‘that you have no great opinion of Mary’s qualifications as a teacher; the position requires training, mental discipline.’

‘How can you talk in that cold way!’ she broke forth indignantly. ‘You know how your sister has been brought up, and that her undertaking anything of the sort is an impossibility.’

‘Nevertheless, you must not be angry with me, Miss Dart, who am not answerable for her imperfections.’

‘I am not angry with you, upon that account at least,’ she added, after a moment’s hesitation.

‘I see,’ he answered, quietly; ‘you are angry with me because, having confessed to possessing means of my own, I do not offer to share them with my half-sister. I think, considering the sentiments she entertains towards me, which are proved by her conduct this very morning, that such an expectation is unreasonable. I hope I am not less generous than other people, or more bitter against my enemies. I

should certainly be willing to make her an allowance, which it is quite as certain, however, she would never accept—no, not if she were starving. You know that as well as I do.'

Miss Dart did know it, and was silent.

'All this is very disagreeable,' he continued; 'but it is absolutely necessary that you should be acquainted with the real state of the case. A chance—most people would call it a great stroke of luck, but I wish to stick to facts—a chance, I say, is offered to Mary of escaping from her troubles, and establishing herself in even a better position than she is now supposed to occupy. The gentleman may not be quite to her taste—he has his weaknesses, I admit, as most of us have—but there is no reason why he should not make her a good husband.'

'Do you mean Mr. Winthrop?' put in Miss Dart, coldly.

'Yes. You need not tell me that he is no favourite of yours; but this is not a question of favourites. It is a case of position and comfort versus poverty and no home.'

'And what would you have me do, since I am not allowed, it seems, to reveal to her the whole truth?'

'I would ask you to hint at it; and if you will not put in a word for Winthrop—of whose merits or demerits you will forgive me for saying you can scarcely be a judge—at all events not to increase her prejudice against him.'

'It is not necessary to increase it, Major Melburn,' was the icy reply, and there was deep disappointment in its tone, as well as displeasure. 'No girl who had any respect for herself could entertain any warmth of feeling for that person; unless, indeed, it were indignation. No; I am sorry that I cannot oblige you in this matter, but sorrier still that you should have asked me to do so. If, as you suggest, I have had but few opportunities of learning Mr. Winthrop's character, that is not the case with *you*. Would you have your sister marry a drunkard?'

'That is a harsh term to apply to a man because he gives way to an occasional weakness.'

'I am not going to argue the matter; I will only say that in my eyes there is no advantage the world can give that could weigh against such a vice in a husband. I have drunk from the cup of poverty all my life, and know its bitterness; but welcome want itself with all its humiliations in preference to such a fate.'

'You are right, Miss Dart,' was the unexpected reply, delivered with enthusiastic vehemence. 'I have said my last word upon this subject, and will never allude to it again. Do not be angry with me for having performed what seemed to me a duty, till you convinced me to the contrary. A man thinks of these matters so differently from a woman, though he does not often find such a woman as you to set him right. What, after all, is a union without love, though it is endowed with all things else? What, indeed, are conventional advantages of any kind compared with the emotions of the heart? Dear Miss Dart, I am ashamed of myself.'

'If you thought you were right, there is no need for shame,' she answered, gently. Her voice trembled a little, she was touched by his frank contrition.

'Golden words, golden words,' he murmured, approvingly. 'Our own conscience, as you say, is the highest law. What matters what the world says or what it thinks, or what conventionality enjoins, if only we obey the dictates of our hearts? Miss Dart, you see before you an unworthy man—one of whom you have doubtless heard much ill.'

'Not a word,' she put in, huskily. It seemed to her that her power of speech was somehow paralysed. Though she heard every word that was addressed to her, nor missed so much as the inflection of a tone, her brain was in a tumult.

'If you have not heard, you will hear,' he went on, with tender earnestness; 'and much that is said to my disadvantage will be true. My mother died before I knew her. You know what sort of father I have. His second marriage did not improve matters so far as I was concerned: there are certain jealousies and antagonisms, as you must have perceived. A man without a home is always in peril. I have often done amiss in many ways. Still I am not utterly worthless.'

'I am quite sure of that,' she whispered, consolingly. She was trembling in every limb.

'I should not be so sure were it not for the feelings I entertain towards yourself,' he continued, gravely. 'There must be something good in a man who recognises goodness, gentleness, and unconventional affection in another. In you I have found all these.'

She shook her head, but very gently. She was afraid of shaking the tears from her eyes.

'Yes, my dear Miss Dart, in you I seem to see my ideal.'

‘I must not listen to this,’ she murmured, making an effort to rise.

‘One moment,’ he said, laying his hand upon her own, ‘and then I shall have done. I will tell you why you think you must not listen; because, forsooth, you happen to be poor and I have a competency; because I am the son of the house to which you have come as a dependent. If I were a lad of twenty there might be some reason in such scruples. You might then be afraid lest some fool should say of you that you were a designing girl. There is no such thing—as compared with the men who are called their victims—as a designing girl; that is a story the hawks have invented against the doves. But in my case such a representation would be ludicrous indeed. Moreover, in uniting your lot with mine you injure no one. My fortune, such as it is, is my own; while for taking me away from my belongings it is certain you will get nothing but thanks. These considerations, it is true, will be superfluous if my proposition itself should be distasteful to you. I am only doing the best for myself by clearing away obstructions. I want a “clear field”; though, alas! I cannot add “and no favour.” If I am tried on my merits, my chance is poor indeed. Do you think it possible, my dear Miss Dart, that, in spite of my faults, you could ever love me?’

He had never let go of her hand, and she no longer struggled, as she had done at first, to escape from his grasp. Her very soul was in a tumult, but its predominant emotion was one of joy. She no longer attempted to conceal from herself that she loved this man; and he was her first love. No man had ever spoken to her of love before. He had anticipated the very objections which had at once occurred to her, and in a great measure had removed them. She felt that she knew but little of him, and called to mind a score of wise reflections she had read concerning the perils of haste under the like circumstances; but like all recorded experiences of other people, they seemed to have little reference to her particular case. The position of every one of us appears exceptional when our feelings prompt us to make light of a general rule.

‘I know so little of you, Major Melburn,’ she said; but she felt that the plea was only in arrest of judgment; that if not now, then to-morrow—if not to-morrow, the next day—she would have to answer him more directly and in the affirmative.

'That is fortunate for me,' he answered, smiling; 'for it is only since I have seen you, and been under your good influence, that I have been worth much. I must entreat you to judge me rather by my future than my past; and especially from your own observation rather than from hearsay. I am like the early Christians in one respect, at all events—that my foes are those of my own household. I cannot say I do not wish to hurry your decision, for I would give half of what remains to me of life to call you my own to-day; but I am willing to wait and hope. May I venture, dear girl, to ask that much?'

'I will think over what you have said,' she answered, with tolerable firmness; 'and at all events, be assured that I am grateful—deeply grateful.'

'No,' he put in, decisively; 'you must not say that. Do not suppose that I am such a fool as to mistake on which side the obligation lies. It is possible the world may think otherwise, but even *I* am not of the world in some things; while you, if I judge you rightly, you despise its judgments, and respect even its laws only when they are in consonance with your sense of what is right. Nevertheless, as you would say'—for Miss Dart was about to speak—'we cannot always act independently of its opinion. It is that which makes caution absolutely necessary in our case. Even if you had consented to make me happy at once, instead of taking my proposal into your consideration, I should still have asked of you to conceal the affair for the present. I need not point out to you how disadvantageously, from the prejudice that exists against me, the suspicion of any engagement between us would affect your relations with your friends at the Look-out, or what a complication would ensue on your return to Burrow Hall. From what you know of me, I think you will admit that I am by nature frank enough; I abhor anything clandestine as much as you do; but until the time is ripe I must entreat you to keep our secret.'

'There is no secret to keep, at present, Major Melburn.'

'I know it,' he put in, quickly; 'though it is cruel to remind me of it; I only feared, supposing your heart should respond to mine, lest you might (as girls, I have heard, do under such circumstances) take Mary into your confidence.'

'That is only where there is sympathy,' answered Miss Dart, gravely. 'Be sure I should never breathe your name to any one who was not friendly to you. Even now, indeed,

for that very reason, it is a sealed subject between your sister and myself.'

He glanced at her with swift approval, and something more; from the expression of his eager eyes she was reminded that in mentioning that very reticence she had made a serious admission. Unlike many of her sex and age, she was not, however, one to take pleasure in concealing her liking. She was willing enough to let her companion know that she looked upon him as a friend, and, indeed, she found it difficult to restrain herself from being still more frank. He had, it was true, given her time for reflection before accepting his suit, but she well knew that in this he ran no risks. Her heart was already in his keeping.

'I shall write no line, dear girl,' he said, 'for that would be dangerous, but I shall expect one, just one, from *you*. In the meantime, Heaven bless and keep you!'

His grasp tightened on her hand, his face came very close to hers; but he drew back with a sigh.

'It is time for us to part,' he murmured, sadly. 'Your absence from home will be noticed. Stay,' he added, hurriedly, 'you must make no secret of our having met; for that old astrologer yonder has caught sight of us. You may say, what is true enough, that I was pleading for Winthrop, and in vain.'

He rose and lifted his hat, like one who has met a lady casually, and is taking leave, and quietly strolled down the pier, past Roger Leyden, who, apparently engaged with a spy-glass in watching the shipping, never turned his head as he went by.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CONFEDERATES.

THERE are occasions when one wishes even our best friends a little farther off; and just now, Elizabeth Dart would have preferred Roger Leyden to have been rubbing up the coins in his museum, or speculating on Danish stock (in the shape of hidden treasure) upon the mound of Battle Hill, rather than standing where he was, at the entrance of the little pier, where she must needs pass close by him to re-enter the town. However, it was already luncheon time, and her absence

would begin to excite, not only surprise, but anxiety, at home ; so she got up, and, with as indifferent an air as she could assume, commenced her retreat. With such an uninterrupted interest did Mr. Leyden continue to regard the ships in the offing that she almost hoped to pass him without notice ; but as she came exactly opposite to him he brought his glass to bear on her (at three feet off, or so), and shut it up with such a vicious snap that, in her state of nervous tension, she could scarcely refrain from uttering a cry of alarm. She not only did refrain from it, however, but contrived to assume a tone of unconcern, as she observed—

‘ You seem to have found some object of great attraction for your telescope this morning, Mr. Leyden ? ’

‘ That is so,’ he answered, grimly ; ‘ I was watching a piratical craft which is but seldom seen in these latitudes. What excited my curiosity was her carrying sail when there was no occasion for it—nothing is more ridiculous than to see a man sitting under an umbrella when there is no rain : if, however, he has a female companion at his side, the circumstance may be accounted for.’

Miss Dart mechanically looked up at the sky, which was serene and unclouded.

‘ It has been like that this half-hour,’ remarked her persecutor, drily. She was annoyed at the observations he had made, of course ; but somehow she was not offended. She was not altogether displeased, perhaps, that the secrecy which had been imposed upon her, as respected any understanding between herself and the Major, should thus be rendered impossible, and through no fault of her own. All clandestine proceedings were distasteful to her—she already repented of having so easily fallen into the Major’s views in that respect ; and then she was so certain of the antiquary’s goodwill that it was difficult to be angry with him.

‘ I see nothing very remarkable, Mr. Leyden,’ she said, quietly, ‘ in sitting by a gentleman’s side with whom I am well acquainted, even though it be under an umbrella ; and I am by no means inclined to admit, even though it were a phenomenon, that I owe you any explanation of it. I may say, however, that I came here at Major Melburn’s own invitation to discuss a matter of great importance concerning his sister.’

‘ I know all that. He wanted to persuade you to advocate Mr. Winthrop’s pretensions, which you very properly declined to do. It is astonishing,’ he added, musingly, ‘ how wise and

prudent we often are in matters affecting other people ; whereas in our own concerns we are prone to lose our heads, and sometimes even our hearts.'

'Very true, no doubt, Mr. Leyden ; but syllogisms can be listened to at any time, while potatoes must be eaten whilst they are hot. It is already past luncheon time, so I must say good-bye.'

'Take care what else you say good-bye to, my dear young lady,' he murmured, solemnly. 'I know, as you say, that I have no right to pry into your affairs ; but if, as I fear, your thoughts are tending in a certain direction, I beseech you to restrain them while you have still the power ; for that way madness lies.'

'You have been consulting the stars again,' returned Miss Dart, scornfully.

'The stars are not to be despised,' he answered, gravely ; 'but it is not in the blue vault of heaven that one would look for any record of Jefferson Melburn.'

'Why did you not tell him what you thought of him just now, instead of slandering him behind his back?' inquired Elizabeth Dart, in tones that trembled with anger.

'Because, for one thing, he knows it ; and for the other, my opinion would not weigh with him one feather.'

'It weighs as lightly, sir, with me,' returned the girl, contemptuously, and, with flashing eyes, passed on into the town.

'Now have you done more harm than good, Roger Leyden,' was the antiquary's muttered self-reproach, as he watched her retreating figure, its step firmer than usual, and its head thrown slightly back, as if in defiance. "'There's no fool like an old fool'" is at its truest in matters of love : I ought to have known that a girl of spirit would resent any cheapening of her bargain in the way of a sweetheart, even though he were the most worthless lot in the market. When I told her that I knew what the fellow had been talking about (no difficult matter to arrive at since I saw his friend Winthrop himself, awaiting his fate, no doubt, at the door of "The Welcome"), and also what answer she had given him (easy enough for any one who knows her keen intelligence and honest heart to guess), I thought that I had impressed her with my knowledge of human nature, but directly I came to speak of the Major himself she became a very Thomas in disbelief. I ought to have known—I ought to have remembered, that is—that it

would be so. Moreover, it was folly to anger her, since the thing will never be. The stars have said it. What! with her sun nine times bigger than the true sun, and all the twelve signs, but Pisces (which only shows that she will never be a shipowner), to suppose that she will marry a spendthrift and a ne'er-do-well like Jefferson Melburn! No. I wonder how her wealth will come to her—"Wealth," as old Samuel called it, "beyond the dreams of Avarice"—for somehow it will come? Perhaps she will turn out to be heiress of long-forgotten and ownerless millions, the last of an ancient race, whose line has been swallowed up as the river by the sand, only to appear again in a dry place. And yet she is too masterful and wise (save in one matter) to have come from a worn-out stock of any kind—a very remarkable young woman, and not for you, Master Melburn, you may take my word for it; nor for any of your kind.'

The object of this uncomplimentary prophecy had, in the meantime, betaken himself to 'The Welcome,' the only inn which Casterton boasted. It stood in the middle of the little High Street, a spot of such unexceptionable advantage that a vehicle could, with skill and judgment, be turned round before its doors without the intrusion of the horse's head into the windows opposite. It was furnished with a portico that could afford shelter, till admittance could be gained within, to at least two persons, and with balconies, containing in summer time each three flower-pots, which gave it upon market-days quite a distinguished and gay appearance. The rooms were exquisitely clean; but their bulging ceilings hung so low that the laws of politeness were taught, perforce, to any guest of moderate height who was inclined to keep his hat on within doors. In the front parlour, upon so short a sofa that he had to supplement it with a chair for the accommodation of his legs, reclined a gentleman with a cigar in his mouth, and a glass of brandy-and-water on a table by his side. In spite of his luxurious position and its concomitants, he appeared by no means at his ease. His brow was knitted, his face was gloomy, his white lips showed where his discoloured teeth had pressed upon them, and he had all the appearance of a gentleman in the sulks—an indisposition which even repeated doses of brandy-and-water have been rarely known to ameliorate.

To him entered Major Melburn, radiant from the result of an interview, and cheerful in the contemplation of his own affairs.

‘You have good news, then, after all, Jeff?’ exclaimed Winthrop, raising himself upon his elbow, and sticking his glass into his eye.

‘Well, no, I am afraid I can hardly say that; but that is not my fault. How deuced imprudent it was of you to show yourself just now on the pier!’

‘Why, you yourself told me to go there.’

‘That was, of course, supposing my sister had been with me; but when you saw that it was not she—that you could not carry matters by a *coup de main*, as we had hoped—you should surely have known better than to intrude yourself. I am sure I frowned at you enough; and if you had had any sense, you would have made yourself scarce at once.’

‘Sense? I suppose you think no one has any sense but yourself?’ returned the other, angrily. ‘I may not have your oily tongue and your slippery ways, but I have eyes in my head, like other people. I could see that it was not on my affairs that you were talking so confidently with your friend, Miss Dart. You are playing the old game, are you? Only this time you have nothing to lose.’

The radiance had departed from the Major’s face at the first words of his companion; but now it grew black as thunder.

‘You had better leave me and Miss Dart to settle our own affairs, my friend,’ he said, in a voice hoarse with suppressed passion, and very menacing.

‘By all means. You may make just as great a fool of her as you like; but you shall no longer make a fool of me.’

The Major smiled contemptuously, as though any operation of that kind from without was a work of supererogation, but his white face and trembling hands betrayed the constraint he was putting on himself.

‘I have done my best for you, and will continue to do it,’ he replied, ‘in spite of your own folly, which checks me at every turn. Brandy at midday in a country inn, where every servant is a tatler! Had Mary been where you expected to find her, you would have addressed her with breath reeking of it! As well have said, “I love you, but I love Drink better.” How *can* you be so mad, Winthrop!’

‘Never you mind me and my brandy,’ returned the other, in dogged but less defiant tones. At first, Mr. Winthrop had been disposed for battle, but he was now inclined to act on the defensive only; the stronger will was beginning to tell.

'Now, it is quite ridiculous for you and me to quarrel, Winny,' exclaimed the Major, frankly, but with a somewhat grating laugh. 'It only gives us the trouble of making it up again. You know the old proverb, "*Amantium iræ*," &c.?'

'Yes; I know the proverb about quarrelling, if that's what you mean. If it makes honest folk come by their own, I can't say that I should object to a little disagreement.'

This reply was one of that nature for which the philosophers tell us we should always be prepared—namely, the unexpected; and it took the Major—who was far from being a philosopher—very much aback. It was not surprising to him that Winthrop's muddled brain should have got two proverbs of certainly very different import so ludicrously mixed, but that his thoughts should have shot to the subject of coming by one's own, or, in other words, of getting one's borrowed money back, on such very slight suggestion. It was clear to him that the question was accustomed to present itself to Mr. Winthrop's mind much oftener and with much more importunity than he had heretofore imagined. It was disgusting that a fellow whom one had admitted to one's friendship, though intellectually so unworthy of it, and even called 'Winny' when one wished to be especially conciliatory, should turn against one in this manner. In the highest and noblest sense, the obligation lay no doubt on Mr. Winthrop's side; but as a mere matter of finance, the other was his debtor.

'You shall be paid, sir, in meal or in malt, never fear,' said the Major, haughtily.

'Yes; but I'm beginning to think that I had rather have it in money,' was the unvarnished reply. In any other man's mouth such a rejoinder would have been an epigram, and could have been parried with a smile, but the force of it in the present case lay in its absolute simplicity and matter of fact, which admitted of no such evasion. What it meant (as the Major was well aware) was, 'I'm getting tired of being fobbed off and fobbed off with the promise of your sister's hand, and would rather see those five hundred pounds back which I lent to you on that which I now think to be very doubtful security.'

'I say again that you shall be paid, or rather that you shall receive what you have agreed to consider an equivalent for payment.'

'And I say again that I prefer cash down.'

'Don't make me angry,' said the Major, hoarsely: 'that

can't do you any good. It is sheer nonsense to talk to me of cash payments, and you know it: you can't get blood from a stone.'

'Oh yes, you can, if you know how to squeeze it,' returned the other cunningly, sipping at his brandy-and-water. 'Even a stone has a tender place sometimes. Suppose I was to tell the pretty governess—— I say, what the devil are you at!'

With a quick movement of his arm the Major had thrust aside the table and made a grab at his companion's throat. Mr. Winthrop mechanically put his knee up, so that the other's hand fell short of its intent. That last insult, a blow—or its equivalent, which once having passed between grown men makes reconciliation impossible—had therefore been arrested. Though murder itself looked forth from the Major's face, he was conscious that his boats had been saved from burning, and was even 'thankful' for it (though it would, perhaps, have puzzled him to say to whom). Even in the words that passion compelled his mouth to utter there was a certain *locus penitentiae* for the man who provoked him; as though some mad elephant, turning to rend its keeper, at the same time should point to the corner of its den, where the little spiral staircase affords a shelter from its fury.

'If you dare to speak what was just now on the tip of your tongue to her or to any living creature, so help me, Heaven, I will kill you! How can you, *can* you be so mad as to threaten it? Promise me, promise before you speak another word, that you will never do it. Can anything be so cowardly, or such a breach of confidence between man and man?'

'You needn't make such a fuss,' said Winthrop, white and trembling, at least as much with rage as fear. By nature he was no coward; but his nerves, weakened by his own excesses, had given way under the unexpected strain upon them, and the consciousness of the fact filled him with resentment. 'A fellow may say, "suppose I were to do so-and-so," I conclude, without intending to do it. I am as much a man of honour, let me tell you, as yourself.'

The claim—and, to say the truth, it was not an extravagant one—was admitted at once.

'Of course you are, Winthrop; and when you are not in drink there is no better fellow in the world. It is that cursed stuff yonder,' he pointed to the floor, where lay the glass and its contents, 'that has been the cause of all this Your

blood might have been spilt along with it, or mine,' he added, quickly, for he felt it was uncomplimentary to take it for granted that a personal contest could only have had one result. 'Well, thank Heaven, it can all be wiped up with a dish-cloth. I am very sorry I lost my temper, Winny.'

'Well, well, it's all right so far,' muttered the other, ungraciously; for one who has been frightened, and is ashamed of it, does not easily forgive; 'but I am sick of these delays and adjournments. Why was not Mary on the pier, as you promised she should be?'

'That wretched Matthew has one of his bad days, as they call it—it's a pity his days don't come to an end—and she was unable to leave him. As to delays, the thing can't hang on much longer. The news from Germany, the other day, makes it certain that Mrs. Melburn's case is hopeless.'

'That I have been told, any time during the last six months,' observed the other, drily.

'True; but it is now not only a question of time, but of a very short time. It is Mrs. Melburn who prejudices Mary against you, and what a dangerous enemy she can be I have myself reason to know. When she is gone you will meet with no obstacle save a little coyness, which a man of your mettle should have no difficulty in overcoming. Unlike her mother, Mary is like wax, and can be moulded as you please. You will be a husband who has his own way.'

'She's a sweet pretty girl, no doubt,' admitted Winthrop; 'but I suppose we shall have to wait three months or so,' he added, 'fully, for the funeral and that.'

'Not at all,' returned the Major, confidently. 'My father and Mary will go to some out-of-the-way place for a change, and then you two can be married quietly, and at once.'

'Oh, as quiet as you please,' returned the other, with a chuckle. 'I suppose I could not see her just now,' murmured the amorous swain, 'not even for a minute!'

'Not to-day; we'll try again in a week or two. It is quite possible that I may then use such arguments with her as may induce her to make you a happy man much earlier than you think for.'

'Very good. The sooner I tear up that little I O U of yours, Jeff, the better for both of us. There are our horses at the door. Now, just one stirrup-cup, and then for the saddle.'

'Not one drop shall you drink more. Even now, when you

get into the open air, you will feel that you have had too much.'

Winthrop muttered a remonstrance in the concise form of an execration, but he submitted. The Major's strong will had once more regained its supremacy. No trace of their late quarrel could be observed in either of them as they went downstairs together and mounted their horses. There are many so-called friendships in the world which exist on similar conditions; as long as the tie of self-interest binds them, natures even the most discordant and even lawless—though the breaches that at times of necessity take place between them are neither forgiven nor forgotten—will yet hold together.

The two gentlemen were both well mounted, and on ordinary occasions it would have been difficult to say which had the better seat: a man, however, may be too much at his ease in the saddle.

'I wish,' said the Major, grimly, as they rode along the stony causeway, 'that you would take your hands out of your pockets.'

'What does it signify? One isn't in the Row,' returned the other, testily.

'That's just it. If you were there it wouldn't so much matter; but if you fell off here, you'd break your neck.'

'What a rum fellow you are, Jeff!' said Mr. Winthrop; but he gathered up his reins at once, and sat as stiff as the Great Duke (though with considerably more of effort) till they reached the downs.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TITANIA.

A GOOD deal too much has been made, in my opinion, of the alteration in a man's character and conduct when he first falls in love; but as regards a girl, the change can scarcely be exaggerated. All things seem literally to have become new with her, and she regards the whole world from a different standpoint from that which she occupied before. She sees everything double; not, indeed, in duplicate, but through her own eyes, and through the eyes of the beloved object. His prejudices, or what she used to consider such, begin to have

some show of reason ; his faults to assume the appearance of virtues. The very class to which he belongs, if it differs from her own, is credited with merits to which she has hitherto been blind. The thought of him monopolises her mind and ousts all others. In most cases there is some confidante of her own sex, to whom she discourses of him, and in whom she finds a sympathy which man (to whom a love-tale is intolerable) denies to man under the like circumstances.

To Elizabeth Dart no such safety-valve for the emotions was vouchsafed. She had to bear her bliss alone, as she had so often borne her woe.

That precaution of taking time to make up her mind as to whether she would accept the Major's offer or no was, she well knew, a mere formula : her heart had been his for the asking, almost from the first. If it be asked how was it that so very intelligent and sagacious a young woman should have made such a choice, our reply is—*circumspice*. One has only to look next door, or over the way, to see the parallel.

Long afterwards, and when the subject of their conversation had become a personage, I remember hearing two great ladies talking of this very matter. 'Beyond good looks and a very pleasant manner,' said one, 'what was there in Major Melburn to have attracted such a woman ?'

'My dear, she saw nothing in him ; she only thought she saw, as Titania did when she called the ass her "gentle joy." Her genius idealised him.'

'The Major, however, was not an ass,' argued the other : 'he was another sort of animal altogether, and in some ways of a far inferior type.'

'That is quite true, but he was the first gentleman with whom she had ever been on equal terms.'

This last remark, though made by one who had but a conventional notion of what constitutes a gentleman, had a great deal of truth in it. The class to which the Major belonged had hitherto been viewed by Elizabeth Dart only at a distance ; its attractions were unknown to her, and what merits belonged to the type she attributed to the individual. It was like a stranger to the game watching two *habitués* at billiards ; he will hear them make many remarks upon the incidents of play, and be persuaded that they have a good deal of wit about them ; whereas everything they say in that way, if he had had their opportunity of observation, he would know is said five thousand times a year on precisely the same

occasions. The gloss of politeness, the veneer of chivalry, which the Major possessed, in common with the whole caste to which he belonged, seemed not only genuine, and the evidence of a noble nature, but as something peculiar to himself. Experience she had none; and in this case her intuition failed her because of her great liking for the man. In love-matters there is good reason to suppose, from his biography, that even Shakspeare was not quite judicious; and the true reason that causes philosophers to make light of love is not because it is illogical, but because it is inexplicable to them and their theories. What showed the preoccupation of Miss Dart's mind, perhaps, beyond all other signs, was that, save a grateful acknowledgment of his letter, she opened no communications with Mr. Argand. That concentration of mind was wanting which is necessary to literary effort. Instead of thinking, she took to dreaming. This, however, was only as regarded her own affairs. The calls of duty and friendship were in no way disregarded.

To Matthew she was invaluable, in selecting such of his poems as were most suitable for publication in the 'Parthenon,' and in suggesting improvements. It was amazing to see how his spirits rose with success, and, if even his physical ailment derived no benefit from it, it seemed to do so from his having something else to think about. In her relations with Matthew, Miss Dart had looked for little change in consequence of what had happened as regarded the Major; but in Mary's case she had feared there would be coldness, or at least a withdrawal of confidence. It was a subject that could not be debated, or on which any new conclusion could be arrived at; the more frank the girl was about it, the worse she knew it must be for herself; and yet it could hardly be ignored. It was not Mary's silence, therefore, but the continuance of matters on the old footing that convinced Miss Dart that her secret remained undivulged. When the first moment of indignation against Roger Leyden had passed away, she had forgiven him—as perhaps she could have forgiven nobody else—for his words of warning. Her sense of justice compelled her to acknowledge his good intentions, and to make allowance for the outspoken and candid nature of the man; and now she was deeply touched by his keeping what he had discovered, and so greatly disapproved of, to himself. It would have been, perhaps, beyond the powers of woman to maintain a similar reticence, under like circumstances. He

never referred to it, even to herself. 'I have said my say once and for all,' was what his manner implied; 'and I have no desire to make mischief.'

As to keeping her own secret, Miss Dart had reviewed the matter calmly and dispassionately in her own mind, and found that she had no scruples about it. If the Major had been of her own age, as he himself had put it, and if their union could have in any way injured the family prospects, her position would have been different; but there was certainly at present no need to provoke disapproval and endanger friendship. Besides, she had not, as yet, even formally accepted him.

There came a time when, looking back at this period of her life with bitterness in her soul, she seemed to have been dwelling in a Fool's Paradise: to many of us no other Paradise is possible, and while it lasts it serves its purpose as though it were a seventh heaven; but it was not so much that her happiness was unreal, as that it was another person, a new Elizabeth Dart, that was enjoying it. Had she been her once keen, sagacious, independent self, she would never have known that hour of joy to which, with self-blinded eyes, she surrendered herself. The flame of love within her, though it burned so brightly, was steady and without flicker. It needed not to be fed with letters from the beloved object, nor with iterations of his vows; and she credited him with the like confidence in delaying her promised reply to him. It was difficult to explain to herself the cause of her procrastination in this respect. Perhaps she had some misgivings, not of herself nor of him, but as regarded the sacrifice he would be making for her sake. Perhaps she willingly prolonged her days of freedom—the last she could call her own—to be used, as she phrased it, without reference to her other self that was to be. However, at last she wrote.

It was a letter different altogether, both in style and spirit, from most acceptances of a similar kind. Her love for him was frankly acknowledged, and devotedly expressed; but she dwelt much on her own shortcomings and unworthiness. Of her former life she said but little; not because she was ashamed of it, but because she was secretly conscious that its details would not interest him. 'I have only one relative in the world,' she wrote: 'my dear Aunt Jane, whom I do not expect that you will see with the same eyes I do, but whom you must love for my sake, if not for her own. My

conscience reproaches me for concealing from her my present happiness; but you see, I am already learning to obey you, and have told her nothing. Nothing is suspected here save by Mr. Leyden, who, I am now convinced, will not betray us. If Mrs. Melburn were in England, I should of course owe it to her to tell her all—I could not remain for twenty-four hours under her roof without doing so; but I feel no such obligation imposed upon me at Casterton, so you may be quite at ease on this point. . . . I quite agreed with what you said the other day about London as a dwelling-place, though I may not have seemed very enthusiastic about it at the time; the fact is—thanks to you, sir—my mind was a little off its balance. I seemed to hear nothing you said (after that one thing); but now every precious word comes back to me. Yes; London, by all means, though doubtless I should have been equally conformable to your wishes if you had said Bath, or Jericho. You have not only robbed me of my heart, but of my will. Hitherto, London has always appeared to me very harsh and egotistic—stony-hearted, as De Quincey calls its Oxford Street; hitherto, I have been but a pilgrim and a sojourner there; with you by my side, it will be no longer a peopled solitude, but something very different. . . . As to what you said of the risk of correspondence, I am quite content not to hear from you; for your silence will give consent to my indulging in a thousand happy thoughts, of which you will be the centre. From the news from Germany to-day, it seems certain that we shall return to Burrow Hall in July, at the farthest. I hear Mrs. Melburn is little, if at all, bettered by the change. When I think of the pain and troubles of others, and contrast them with my present bliss, I am ashamed of my own unworthiness; such sentiments, however, I know, appear in your *Index Expurgatorius* under the general head of doldrums; so no more of them. When I am with you, I can make myself very disagreeable, as you know, in the way of lectures and reproofs; but now that I am away, I am only bent on pleasing you. Alas, alas, how I love you!’

There was much more to the same effect: the self-abnegation of a sovereign will—the homage of a noble heart to an idol of its own creation—with now and again a struggle where the old individuality and independence of character made a stand for an instant against the tide of passion.

When the letter was posted, Miss Dart experienced a

sense of extreme relief. The Psalmist's *Liberavi animam* has an application far wider than the religious circle. Nervous and excitable persons, over whom some important stroke of Fate is impending, are often driven to their wits' end by the contemplation of it; but let them once sit down and write their appeal, defence, or whatever plea in restraint of execution occurs to them, then the weight, though it still overhangs their heads, is removed from their hearts. They have done their best, is their comforting reflection, and they can do no more; and when the mind is monopolised by joyful anticipation instead of apprehension, the same effect is produced by a similar course of action.

For the first time since the Major's proposal, Miss Dart now felt herself free to follow the natural bent of her disposition, and to turn her thoughts to Mr. Felix Argand and the 'Millennium.' She had, of course, acknowledged that gentleman's letter, but no other communication had passed between them. She had read with attention the copies of the review with which he had supplied her; but they had given her little assistance in the way of suggestion. Its contents were varied enough, and perhaps too varied. Had their range been more limited, it would have made her choice of a subject easier. She was not one of those literary aspirants to whom everything that is their own appears to have a peculiar charm and the stamp of originality. There was nothing in her collection of MSS. that seemed suitable, or, at all events, as representative of her powers. Disappointed, but not dispirited, it suddenly struck her that a description of Casterton and its surroundings, which had made so deep an impression on her own mind, might have some interest for those who were strangers to such old-world haunts.

The town with 'Silence and old Time' for its indwellers; the downs, with their freedom and solitude; the sea, and the marsh that had once been the sea; and, above all, Battle Hill, with its legend and its buried mystery: these at least were subjects in themselves not commonplace, and capable of picturesque treatment. She wrote a sketch of them at a sitting; which, however, was prolonged till daybreak, and in hot haste. Ideas suggested themselves to her with such rapidity that she feared her pen would fail to seize them ere they escaped; a day or two was devoted to correction and excision, when she was amazed to find how little was to be effected in the way of improvement, for she had yet to learn

that with genius it is not the second thoughts that are best. Finally, she made a fair copy of the article, and, with many misgivings and an apologetic letter, despatched it. As the contributions to the 'Millennium' were all signed, it was necessary to follow that practice; but she entreated the editor's permission, in the unexpected case of his accepting the paper, to permit it to wear a pseudonym. She entitled it 'A Bit of Old England,' and signed it 'John Javelin,' which, while having some vague reference to her own name, would conceal it, as well as her sex, from recognition.

Unlike her communication to Burrow Hall, when once it was dropped into the post she regretted its departure, and was tormented with the conviction of its inadequacy and shortcomings. Even when, like the dove from the Ark, after many days it did not return to her, she drew no favourable augury from that circumstance, but pictured it lying in unequal strips in Mr. Argand's waste-paper basket.

CHAPTER XXV.

SENT FOR.

SAVE for the proof-sheets from the 'Parthenon,' which now came pretty frequently to Matthew, with now and then a cheque, which, though of insignificant amount, filled his heart with gladness such as only our first earnings can bestow; the Casterton postman had almost a sinecure as regarded the Look-out. Mrs. Meyrick was only not forgotten by the world, because it had never known her; beyond the four walls of her little home she had no friend even on paper; while Miss Dart's sole correspondent was Aunt Jane, who every week indited an epistle from the New Road, full of domestic intelligence respecting Mary Anne, the fourteenth or fifteenth of the lodging-house maidens (as it happened), her breakages, and her cousin in the Guards, with some notes on natural history, taken from personal observation of Mouser, the black cat. With the like regularity, letters came for Mary Melburn, from her mother; but which by no means indulged in detail. They dwelt much more upon her daughter's doings than her own, and it was rather by reading between the lines of her communication than from anything she said of her own

health that Mary gathered there was no improvement in it, but rather the contrary. The Squire, no doubt, had written to his son upon that subject with greater candour ; but, even as it was, Mary's heart was full of forebodings. That her present happiness, and her freedom from the hateful attentions of Mr. Winthrop, were purchased by her mother's voluntary exile she had no suspicion—no child can guess the self-sacrifice of which a mother is capable—but the thought of her, ill, solitary, or worse than solitary, and in a foreign land, made the girl's heart ache.

One morning a letter arrived for her from the Squire himself, the very sight of which chased the colour from her cheeks. Her father scarcely ever wrote to her, and the apprehension that he had written in her mother's stead, because she was too ill to write, at once occurred to her. The communication, however, which was very brief, was to some extent reassuring. Mr. Melburn described his wife's health as neither better nor worse ; but, since it was no better, he had decided to bring her home at once, where they would arrive on the day, or perhaps even the day before, his letter would reach Casterton. In this uncertainty there might be a difficulty in sending the carriage for Mary and Miss Dart, and he therefore directed them to proceed to Burrow Hall forthwith in some hired conveyance. In her delight at the prospect of so soon embracing her mother, the urgency implied in this last sentence at first escaped Mary's notice ; but to Miss Dart the summons appeared very grave. She even reproached herself for being less cast down by it than the occasion seemed to demand ; but the fact is, that in the marshalling of human affairs, those of other people, unless they are very dear to us, must always stand in the rank behind our own ; and the same word of command which recalled Mary to the couch of her invalid mother summoned Miss Dart to her lover.

But for that reflection, it would have been grief to her, indeed, to bid adieu to Casterton. The place itself had attractions for her—its quiet, old-world isolation, its wind-swept waste of marsh and downland, and the murmur and passion of its sea—such as no other place had ever had. It is only in a few cases that locality, independent of association, takes any hold of the human heart ; as a rule, man is almost as indifferent to nature in its particular aspects as nature is to him ; but now and then it happens—and this is by no

means confined to persons of romantic or impressionable dispositions—that the heart is drawn to some scene of beauty as to a home. The rich man says, ‘I will come here again next year,’ or even, if he is very much enraptured, ‘I will live here.’ Miss Dart, who had no such opportunities of gratifying a caprice, could only wish ‘Good-bye’ to Casterton. It was possible, and even probable, that she might never see it again, and the thought of that long farewell filled her with something more than regret—with hopeless yearnings. The parting, too, with her hostess and Matthew was full of sadness. Mrs. Meyrick had shown nothing but kindness to her : if the widow had little worldly wisdom, she had none of the follies of the world : no pride, no estimation of persons by their purses ; and she was a gentlewoman to the core. It was impossible, thanks to the Squire’s frankness of expression, that she could be unconscious of her weaknesses and incompetence, but of her own virtues she remained in utter ignorance.

When Miss Dart, as she took leave of her, exclaimed, not without tears, ‘Dear Mrs. Meyrick, how good you have been to me !’ the widow was honestly amazed.

‘I good to you, Lizzie ! Why, you have been a sunbeam in our house ; and how can I ever be grateful enough to you for the interest you have taken in my poor boy ?’

Matthew, indeed, felt her departure only less than the loss of Mary.

‘I am indebted to you, dear Miss Dart,’ he said, ‘if not for a new existence, for infusing vitality into the old one. Thanks to you, I am another creature, though still but a poor one. Your encouragement has put hope into me : thanks to your good offices, I have found touch of my fellows. I shall never forget you—never,’ and then the poor lad had turned his face to the wall, ashamed of the weakness that he could not hide.

Roger Leyden, too, in spite of his plain speaking, had a high place in her regard. Even as a man of character, with a distinct individuality of his own, he was very interesting to her ; but his devotion to her friends, and his tender consideration for herself, shown in a hundred ways (but in none more than his silence upon a matter the revelation of which would have sadly marred her farewells, and even, perhaps, turned their regret to bitterness), had endeared him to her.

‘We shall meet again, my dear young lady,’ he said, with

cheerful confidence, 'though under very different conditions. You are going away in the Casterton fly, but you will return, like Lord Bateman's inamorata, in a coach and three. The stars have said it.'

His presence among the little circle at the moment of leave-taking was a great relief to all concerned.

How sad it seems that there should be such partings, that such shadows should fall upon homes that at the best have so little sunshine!—that the bridegroom should be taken from the arms of his bride, and the boy from the embraces of his mother to tempt the perilous seas, when so little, and that which even man could supply, is wanting to prevent the catastrophe! It is easy to say, 'If these unfortunates could only see through their tears but a little way into the future, how much better for them, they would often admit, it is that things are thus arranged': but, alas! no such prevision is vouchsafed to them. And, in the meantime, what solitary homes, what vacant chairs, what echoes of imagined footfalls on the one side; what lookings back and picturings of the far away, and yearnings that try the very heartstrings, on the other! Regard them how we may, such departures are as Death itself, without that balm of resignation which the sense of the inevitable commonly bestows. In such cases, it is those who remain who are most to be pitied, for everything reminds them of what they have lost; while those who go forth have their minds distracted from regret by action amid new scenes and duties.

When the door of the Look-out closed on its late visitors, there was darkness indeed on the faces they had left behind them.

For awhile, too, the shadow of the parting hour saddened the two girls as they sat in silence side by side in the jolting fly, and slowly passed by the old familiar places. It was possible they would never see them again, and only too probable that, if one revisited them, it would be without the other; but when the causeway was passed, and the hill climbed, and the breeze of the downs began to blow about them, their spirits began to rise. There was scarce a cloud in the summer sky. The larks twittered and towered and sang about their heads. The air was sweet with herb and flower.

'I cannot but think that such weather as this must do dear mamma good?' said Mary, cheerfully, but half inter-

rogatively, as such remarks are made when we need corroboration of our hope.

'Yes, indeed; though I believe less in native air than in the influence and associations of home. You will say, perhaps, since I have no personal experience of them, that that is a subject on which I can be no judge, but my reading points that way.'

'You are thinking of Scott,' said Mary, softly, with the tears in her eyes. They had been reading Lockhart's 'Life' together lately, and Mary, who had been introduced to it for the first time, had been deeply touched by that sad passage when Sir Walter, returning—a dying man—from abroad, is roused from his stupor by the voice of the Tweed.

It was an unfortunate chord to have touched, as Miss Dart felt.

'I was not thinking of Scott in particular, dear Mary,' she said, gently, 'but of the thousands of invalids who are recommended to try foreign scenes by their medical advisers. Scientifically, they may be correct; but they do not sufficiently take into account the depressing effect upon the patient caused by the severance of home ties, which often far outweighs any benefit conferred by change of climate. There is nothing that so retards recovery as low spirits: it is only too much to be feared that your mother has suffered from them while she has been away from you; and the sight of the roses on your pretty cheeks will do her more good, I honestly believe, than all the Brunnen of Germany.'

Mary answered only by a sigh; the silence between the two girls remained unbroken for many a mile. They were both busied with their own thoughts; which, though there was no lack of sympathy between them, were of a widely different kind: the one was dwelling on the last days of Love when it moves hand-in-hand with Death; the other on its early prime. Mary lay back in the vehicle with closed eyes, and tears beneath their lids. Miss Dart, though grave enough, took note through the open windows of every feature of the landscape—the shadows on the hills, the smoke wreaths from the valley farms, even the contrast of colours of the turf on which they drove with that of the untrodden down: every object of nature had a novel charm and significance for her.

'Do you think that man—Mr. Winthrop—will be there Lizzie?' inquired Mary, presently. She spoke in a low,

quiet tone, such as one uses who has been thinking on a subject long before he speaks; but the question startled her companion exceedingly.

'No,' she replied, hastily; 'he will not be there.' Then, as if conscious she had been too confident, she added, 'It is, at least, very unlikely.'

'My mother being so ill, you mean?'

Miss Dart did mean that: but she had had also in her mind the half-promise that the Major had given her that Mary's persecution should be dropped.

'I think on Mrs. Melburn's first coming home, and as an invalid,' she exclaimed, 'that no guest is likely to be invited to the house; and especially one that is known to be unwelcome to her.'

'He is, however, Jefferson's friend,' observed Mary.

'I think you wrong your brother in supposing him capable of inviting Mr. Winthrop under such circumstances.'

In her heart she felt certain, for other reasons, that he would not be there; and she was secretly well pleased to be able to defend the Major with confidence against the imputation of selfishness.

Mary seemed about to speak, but restrained herself; she only shook her head, with a melancholy incredulous smile, and again relapsed into silence.

Presently they came to the crest of the hill, from which the house was visible.

Mary leant forward, and gazed at it intently; the hand she laid on the window-frame was trembling; her lips murmured 'Thank Heaven!'

Miss Dart understood at once that the poor girl had feared to see the blinds down.

'You must keep up a good heart, Mary,' she said, reprovingly; 'and especially in your mother's presence. I beseech you, for her sake, to be as brave as you can.'

Mary made a gesture of assent, and pressed her companion's hand. She well understood that the comparative coldness of the other's tone arose from no want of sympathy: there are occasions when firmness, even to severity, is a greater kindness than the softest word.

The lodge gate was fastened back, which was not usual, and when the vehicle drew up at the portico the front door was opened on the instant, both, as Miss Dart's quick intelligence suggested to her, inauspicious signs. To his young

mistress's eager inquiry the butler answered that Mrs. Melburn was as well as could be expected after her long journey of yesterday—a reply, evidently learnt by heart, that confirmed the governess's suspicions. Mary instantly hurried upstairs, leaving Miss Dart alone in the hall.

There was nothing for her to do, not even to 'unpack'; for the luggage of the two young ladies was to follow them from Casterton in a cart. As she stood irresolute, hoping that Mr. Melburn might appear and give her some certain information of his wife's condition before her own interview with her should take place, the door of the breakfast-room was pushed noiselessly open, and a voice she knew, though it had never shaped that word before, murmured 'Lizzie.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

OUTSIDE THE WINDOW.

It was the same room in which she had had that first interview with him on her arrival at Burrow Hill, when his naturalness and good-humour had put her at her ease and convinced her that there was one person, at least, in that strange house with whom she would be able to 'get on.' But his reception of her on this occasion was very different. 'Oh, happy hour!' he whispered beneath his breath, and drew her to his breast, and kissed her again and again.

'You got my letter, then,' she said, softly, as though excusing herself for submitting to these caresses, which the consciousness that she had acknowledged her love for him made, in truth, a thousand times more intoxicating.

'Of course I did, my darling, and shall wear it next my heart till you take its place,' was the ardent rejoinder. 'Think what it has cost me not to reply to it; and think,' he added, with a glance at the unclosed door behind which they stood, 'what a need for caution there must be which imposed upon me such a cruel silence.'

'But there is no need now,' said the girl, withdrawing from him with a sudden impulse.

'Indeed there is, darling, and more than ever. You will surely put a little trust in me!' he pleaded; for her face had suddenly grown very grave. 'You will not misconstrue or misconceive my motives, as others have done, when I

say that for some time yet we must needs keep our love a secret.'

'I cannot do it—not even for your sake,' she answered, firmly.

'But you have done it already, dearest.'

'With Mary it was different. I owe her no such duty as I owe Mrs. Melburn; but under *her* roof there must be nothing clandestine. If I deceived her, I should be unworthy of you.'

'You do not know how ill she is, Lizzie.'

'That would only make it worse—to deceive a sick, perhaps a dying, woman! How can you ask it of me?'

'Because I love you so; because the thought of any hindrance to our union drives me wild. Hindrance!—nay, there would be flattest denial. You do not know my stepmother's obstinate nature, nor my father's pride.'

'I am proud, too, in my way,' returned Miss Dart. Her shapely figure was drawn up to its full height; her eyes sparkled with a light that was new to him. She was resolute, it was plain, to have her will; and yet, as he gazed upon her, and bit his lip in doubt and fear, he could not withhold his admiration. It seemed to him that her beauty had never shone so gloriously before.

'There is only one way,' he murmured mechanically. 'Give me till to-morrow. Promise me at least this much—that for twenty-four hours you will not disclose the—the relations between us.'

'I do not like it,' said Miss Dart, doubtfully, and yet remorseful of her doubt. It was terrible to her to have to oppose him; almost as terrible as that sharp, quick pang at her heart—caused by she scarce knew what—which had made her step back from him a few minutes ago.

'Do you suppose *I* like it?' he exclaimed, bitterly. 'Do you think it will be easy or pleasant for me, for even twenty-four hours, to keep at a distance from you; to treat you as if nothing had passed between us; to put a padlock on my lips; to veil my eyes; to hide the thoughts—the loving, blissful thoughts—that consume my soul? Oh, Lizzie!—to refuse my first request, and that so slight a one!'

His words, uttered with passionate vehemence, but in suppressed, scarcely audible tones, melted her heart within her; but what moved her even more were his pleading eyes, his beseeching looks, his strong arms held forth in piteous expostulation

'I do not refuse it,' she answered, with her hand upon her heart, as though to restrain its wild and unaccustomed beating. 'I will keep our secret till to-morrow.'

'For that, much thanks. It is the last time that I shall ask you to give way to any wish of mine; henceforth, it is your will in all things that shall be my law—the law of love.' Again he took her to his arms and kissed her tenderly—then suddenly started back, with an exclamation.

'What is it?' she inquired, her manner almost composed by contrast with his agitation and alarm.

'Nothing. I thought I saw a man's shadow through the window; my father is somewhere in the grounds, and if he should have seen us——'

'Well, and what then?' she put in, disdainfully. 'He will know to-day what he will have to be told to-morrow, that is all. What have we to be ashamed of?'

'Nothing, indeed,' he answered, eagerly; 'but you do not know my father. What would happen—should he discover our secret—would be, that you would be packed home at once—and I, well, packed *off*. What then? again you may say.' He broke off abruptly, and fell to pacing the little room. 'Well, by Heaven, I believe you are right. A woman's instinct is sometimes better than all the wisdom of the serpent. On the whole, I believe it would be the best thing that could happen. You would go to your aunt's house, of course; and I would take lodgings in the same parish for three weeks—that is necessary, I believe, to secure a licence. Or, still better, we could go to a registry office: you are not one to care about orange-flowers, and bridesmaids, and all the paraphernalia of the altar. Why should I not call you mine at once?'

'That was not my proposition,' said Miss Dart. 'I wish you to do nothing rash or without consideration.'

'I am sure you don't—the proposal comes from me. I am not a young gentleman under age, or just of age. I am my own master—that is, until I knew you. Now, I am your slave.'

It was pleasant to her to hear him call himself so—this strong-willed and impetuous man, of whom so many stood in fear—even if she did not quite believe it; as to his offer, she did not take the same view of it as other girls, no better; if better placed, might have done; the standpoint from which she viewed it was so different; she had pride enough, but her

pride inclined her to it. She resented the contempt which, as he had implied—and, no doubt, with good reason—the Squire would regard her. She knew herself superior to the whole race of Melburns (save one) from the Conquest downwards. Birth and blood were nothing to her, wealth she did not desire; if the Major had represented himself to her as a man of fortune, instead of one with moderate means, it would not have affected her a hair's breadth in his favour; it would, indeed, have been to his disadvantage, since, in taking him, she might have been taking something away from others. It seemed to her that she had no less right to make her choice of him than he of her. That she could make him a good wife, she felt assured; she was ready to sacrifice herself to him in all ways, and, at the same time, to benefit those belonging to him. Whatever influence she might have on him would be used to mend the breach between him and his family, and to disabuse their minds from the prejudices they entertained against him. She would, above all, be in a position to oppose the designs of Mr. Winthrop should he still attempt to prosecute them. All these considerations pressed upon her mind. What she was not so conscious of was that his passion was re-echoed and responded to in her own heart by an equal yearning. If love consumed him as he had said, it also burnt in her, though with a far purer and steadier flame. She had spoken to him with apparent calmness and deliberation, but it had cost her much to do so; she had longed to say, even to that proposition of secrecy, and, as it had seemed to her, almost of duplicity, 'Whatever you please, dearest; to be assured of your love is all I ask;' and now, when what he proposed involved no dereliction of duty, why should she hesitate to make him happy? His scheme, perhaps, was somewhat audacious; but it was not like an elopement proposed by a young heir, but only a taking of the bull by the horns—a bold method of doing away at a stroke with the obstructions that stupidity and convention were certain to offer to their union. In delay there was certainly danger, and to both of them: why should she run the risk of their happiness being sacrificed at the altar of family pride?

'If I am thrust out of these doors through no fault of mine,' she answered, after a long silence, 'I am ready to do as you think best and wisest.'

'If you are thrust out of these doors, my darling,' repeated

the Major, with tender earnestness, 'my arms will be open to you. In the meantime, while you remain here be surprised at nothing that happens.'

He pressed his lips to her forehead, as if in sign and seal of their agreement, and noiselessly left the room.

She stood awhile half dazed, but wholly happy, till the unaccustomed hush and silence in the house reminded her that all is not love in the world: while she had been partaking of its raptures, what a scene of misery was in all probability being enacted above-stairs! Could the love be worthy, she asked herself in bitter self-reproach, that had made her, even for a few minutes, oblivious of the fact?—and yet—and yet—was she to blame that human nature had been too strong for her? White, and silent as a ghost, she hurried through the empty hall and up the stairs to her own room, whither, as she guessed, Mary would presently come to fetch her; but instead of taking off her bonnet and cloak, she sank down on a chair, overcome by a tumult of emotions. Through the open windows, which looked out immediately on a small shrubbery leading to a paddock, where the cattle were standing under the trees, came all those tranquil sounds which seem to intensify the noon-day silence of the summer. The dreamy caw of the rooks, the cock-crow from some distant farmyard, the swishing of the cows' tails, the swing of the bough released from the weight of the blackbird—it seemed as though, like Fine-Ear in the fairy story, she could almost hear the grass grow. Had she done wrong, or had she done right? Had she been thinking of herself and her own advantage all along while flattering herself that she was doing her best for others? From all self-seeking in the way of profit or position she could honestly exonerate herself, and leave the court of conscience without a stain; but, in giving way to her lover's persuasions, had she not been conscious of finding for herself an escape from slavery, a termination to a life of ungenial toil? What would honest and simple-hearted Aunt Jane say when she came to hear of her engagement; or, rather, what would she probably think of it while locking her thoughts in her own heart lest they should do her darling wrong? And if even Aunt Jane should thus arraign her, could Mrs. Melbourne, and those who thought with her on such subjects, be blamed for imputing selfish and unworthy motives?

Here the fragrance of a cigar was borne on the summer breeze, and a footstep that she knew passed close beneath the

open window ; then an angry voice cried, 'Jefferson, a word with you' ; and the footsteps halted ; others came up to where they stopped, and she felt that the Squire and his son were standing within a few yards of where she sat, and were about to speak of her. Whether it was her duty to rise and let them know that she was within earshot, it is difficult to say ; but Nature had decided for her. Her limbs were paralysed—not, indeed, with fear, but with a certain dread expectancy : her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. She could only picture to herself the two men standing face to face—Mr. Melburn pale with rage, and the Major with that quiet imperturbable look which he always wore in times of variance with his people.

'I will thank you to pursue none of your disgraceful intrigues, sir, under my roof,' were the Squire's first words. Terrible words indeed ; but, even while they rang in her burning ears, Miss Dart did not forget the nature of the speaker, or the circumstance that drew them from his lips. The Squire was just the man who, in his moments of fury, exaggerates the crime of an offender and generalises an accusation for the very purpose of embittering it.

'Indeed, sir, you are doing me wrong,' was the quiet reply. She could see him, though the wall was between them, flicking away the ash from his cigar, and smiling confidently under his moustache.

'I know the morality of your profession as to falsehood, where a woman is concerned,' answered the Squire, contemptuously ; 'or else I should say you were lying.'

'I hope you will not say that, sir,' replied the Major, not pleadingly, but in a tone of suppressed menace.

'Let me say at once, then, that I happened to be passing by the study window ten minutes ago, and thereby save you the trouble of further subterfuge. Perhaps you will explain with as little circumlocution as the case admits, how you came to be kissing my daughter's companion ?'

'Nothing is simpler, sir ; indeed, if this inquisition had not taken place, it was my intention this very day to have told you—not, indeed, that I had kissed Miss Dart, which is, after all, a superfluous detail ; but that I had found it necessary for both our sakes to secure her as an ally in a certain affair which is at least as important as a flirtation with a governess.'

'You admit the flirtation, however,' remarked the Squire, drily.

‘Well, yes; the only means that occurred to me for securing her services,’ replied the Major coolly, ‘was to pretend to make love to her.’

Miss Dart shuddered as she listened: the lie, she felt assured, was uttered for her sake; but it was no less a lie. She had read that, in men’s eyes, or in some men’s eyes, all was fair in love and war; but hitherto with contempt and disapproval. Was it possible that true love could ever be the excuse for an untruth? The very calmness with which the lie was told appalled her. Could love, and not custom, have given that impressive tone, that confidence of utterance, which almost to her ears carried conviction with it?

‘It has, perhaps, escaped your notice,’ continued the Major—with one pause, owed to a puff of his cigar—‘that Miss Dart, giving way, no doubt, to certain influences which have been brought to bear upon her, has all along opposed herself to your wishes in the matter of Mr. Winthrop; a piece of impertinence, you would say’—this, no doubt, in answer to some contemptuous gesture of the Squire’s—‘but we must take things as we find them: her opinion has great weight with Mary, and it seemed to me worth a little trouble to win her over to our views.’

‘Why not have told me all this at once, and let me have sent her packing?’ returned the Squire, quickly.

‘You know my position here, sir, and how any direct interference of mine, even for Mary’s good, would have been resented by Mrs. Melburn and misrepresented to yourself. I have, as it happens, fallen under your displeasure even as matters stand: that is my misfortune; I have done my best, and failed, it seems, most egregiously. As to Miss Dart, you shall never have to complain of my speaking one word to her again; but on the other hand, while she remains under this roof, you may take it for granted that Winthrop’s attentions will be persistently discouraged.’

‘I shall give Miss Dart her *congé* this very day,’ said the Squire, with sudden decision.

‘In my opinion, you could not do a wiser thing, sir,’ said the Major, indifferently.

Miss Dart heard this without surprise; now that she had once got over the shock of the Major’s duplicity, the rest seemed strangely familiar to her—like one of those scenes which we fancy have occurred to us in a previous state of existence. She understood, as if she had been at the back

of his mind, that his object was to get her out of the house that he might follow her to London at once and marry her.

There was the quick spurt of a match and silence while another cigar was being lit. Then a pause which had no such explanation. The Squire was regarding his son with eyes once more full of suspicion; the indifference he had shown as to the governess's departure had perhaps been overdone.

'When does your leave expire, sir?' he presently asked, abruptly.

'It has only just begun,' returned the Major, smiling. 'At the risk of being wearisome to my family, I thought of living at home for the next six weeks.'

The Squire stroked his chin and nodded his head, as if in sign that, having considered the matter, he felt, upon the whole, satisfied. He turned upon his heel as if to retrace his steps, then suddenly stopped, and in grave, quick tones, such as one uses to escape from an unpleasant subject, observed, 'I conclude, Jefferson, that your wife is still alive?'

'Yes, sir; she is.'

Footsteps upon the gravel dying away in opposite directions: on the one side sharp and decided; on the other, over which hung the tobacco-smoke, slow and dawdling—the steps of a careless loungeur. Then the caw of the rook, and the crow of the cock, and the swishing of the cows' tails in the shade again. All was the same as it had been ten minutes ago; but, in the meantime, a life had been shattered. There are wounds which the misconduct of those we love is capable of inflicting on our spiritual nature similar in their effects to those of gunshot wounds on the human frame: death ensues, but without mutilation; and there are also catastrophes equivalent to those produced by the bursting of a shell, by which the whole moral being is laid in ruins. Of these latter victims, one here and there, if we have strength to bear the knife—the lopping away of the last fragments of misplaced trust, the splinters of diseased and morbid love—will sometimes recover; but he is never, as the phrase goes, 'the same man he was' again. And this thing is still more true in the case of a woman.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A TURN OF THE TIDE.

As the prophet, during the overturning of a pitcher, seemed to himself to have experienced the joys of seven heavens, so he might doubtless have felt during the same time (had his imagination tended the other way) the pangs of as many hells ; similarly, it was not a minute since the hearing of that dreadful question, 'I conclude that your wife is still alive?' and its still more dreadful answer, 'Yes, sir, she is,' that Elizabeth Dart remained motionless in her chair ; but within that minute were crowded such agonies of emotion as would have sufficed an ordinary soul for its earthly lifetime. Presently she rose, and, taking up mechanically her little hand-bag, stole, with tottering steps, down the back staircase ; then passing through the servants' offices (where a cook-maid saw her, and afterwards observed that Miss Dart 'looked as though she were a-walking in her sleep'), she reached the carriage drive, and passed unobserved through the lodge gates.

She was bound for Casterton, the only place in the world, save London, where she could find a friend ; she would have gone to town from the railway station at once, but that she had no money—not even so much as was necessary to pay her fare. We often glibly say that the rich have their troubles like the poor ; but we forget to add that the same troubles are increased tenfold in the case of the latter through the absence of the mere means of remedy or escape : their child may be ill in both cases, but in the one case the doctor cannot be sent for, or the remedies he prescribes cannot be procured ; or the home may become hateful and the scene of insult, where the poor inmate has not the wherewithal which the rich one possesses to seek another or even to leave it.

The road between Elizabeth Dart and her destination was long and hilly ; but, under ordinary circumstances, it would not have tried her strength and youth very severely. But a laden heart is a heavy burden ; and even the physical difficulties that lay before her added insensibly to its weight. It would be evening, she dimly reflected, before the summit of Battle Hill would loom in sight, even supposing that she had the skill to keep the almost trackless way. How wearisome

looked the steep and blinding chalk road ; how desolate the treeless downs, which an hour before had reflected the brightness of her hopes !

In motion, however, especially of a fatiguing kind, our bitterest griefs, though they may not, indeed, be assuaged, for the time are stanch'd, which is why some men speak of 'walking off their cares,' as though it were the gout. And it was only when, at the summit of the first hill, Miss Dart sat down by the wayside for breath, that the full consciousness of her misery began to dawn on her. Curiously enough, it was not the sense of her misfortune but that of her wrongs which took the foremost place ; exasperation at the injustice with which she had been treated swelled her proud heart well-nigh to bursting, and scorched the tears that would otherwise have flowed for her woes. To put as much space as possible between herself and the roof that sheltered that perfidious slaving snake, Jefferson Melburn, had been her first blind impulse ; but on reflection, if the torrent of angry thoughts that swept across her mind could be so termed, the contempt and callousness of the Squire scarcely less aroused her resentment. The passionate indignation of the deceived woman included father and son in the same condemnation ; it was not 'that man' only, to think of whom raised the fever of her blood to boiling heat, but 'those men.' The Squire, it is true, did not know what had passed between herself and the Major ; but he knew that, notwithstanding he was vowed to another, his son had made love to her ; and yet he had only objected to it as a domestic scandal which might disadvantageously affect himself—nay, when persuaded that the object of this atrocious duplicity had been to further his own ends, he had actually acquiesced in it as 'only a flirtation with a governess !' Great Heavens ! what was this race of profligates and schemers that, to further one nefarious plan, the happiness and reputation of a friendless girl should not weigh with them a feather weight ? 'And my blood, too, is not ditch water,' was the reflection she would have borrowed from another's lips had she been in the humour for quotation.

However we glaze and hide the matter, our respect for those whom we conventionally term our 'betters' is but the thinnest crust, which one stamp from the foot of insolent injustice destroys for ever ; and, in the case of a naturally independent spirit, sets free a lava-stream of fiery hate, the existence of which, but for that unlucky rent, would never have been suspected,

the contemptuous indifference which such a nature opposes to mere annoyance easily passing for submission, or even acquiescence. It is of this sort, and by this means, that in unquiet times revolutionists are manufactured. Elizabeth Dart had nothing in her composition of the petroleuse, nor could she under any circumstances have become vindictive; but her whole soul rose in arms against the social system which she held responsible for her wrongs. Nay, to borrow an historic phrase, which well describes the sudden and yet permanent change which had taken place in her character, 'it was not a rising, it was a revolution.'

In the tumult of her mind, and the wide sweep of its indignation, Mrs. Melburn herself did not escape reproach. If that lady suspected, as it was almost certain she did, that her stepson was paying his attentions to a girl beneath her roof, to whom by every law of hospitality she stood in the place of a parent, was it not her plain duty to have warned her that they must of necessity be of a dishonourable nature? It was true that she had evinced displeasure at what had seemed to be the signs of familiarity or of a mutual understanding between the Major and her governess. But that was explicable enough: on selfish grounds she had objected to any alliance with her enemy. But cognisant, as she must needs be, of his being a married man, it was shameful of her not to have spoken out, and, with however rough a hand, dragged her from the precipice on which she stood. If the Squire had been callous and brutal, his wife's conduct, being a woman, was worse, and could only have been accounted for on worse grounds—namely, that having failed to secure her as a partisan, she was not displeased to see her bringing on herself a punishment the extremity of which was practically without limit. To do Elizabeth Dart justice, however, this odious accusation had flashed with lurid light but for a moment across her mind, which shrank with horror from the very picture of its own devising. She felt that she had done the dying woman a wrong as grievous, though only in her thoughts, as had been inflicted on herself in practice; that either the Major's marriage must have been a secret to all but his father, or that the serious character of his attentions to herself must have escaped Mrs. Melburn's notice. As for Mary, there was still room in her bruised and embittered heart for pity for her as she thought of the pain which her sudden and unexplained departure must needs inflict upon that gentle nature. To

what would she attribute this abrupt desertion of her in that day of distress, and perhaps of need? What would she do when she found that she had fled?

There was a sound of wheels upon the hill behind her. Was it possible that, having discovered her flight, and the direction it had taken, she was coming after her to induce her to return? Or could it be that man himself, unconscious of the revelation of his baseness! Her heart stood still within her at the thought. How hateful had that smiling face, those gracious and confiding tones, the very form whose strength and symmetry had once charmed her eyes, become! She pictured him now saying always, with sullen, indifferent face, 'Yes, sir; my wife is still alive.'

As the vehicle came in sight, she recognised, with great relief, the fly in which she had come from Casterton, and which, after the horses had rested and been refreshed at the inn, was doubtless returning thither. In this little matter, at least, Fortune, which owed her so much of reparation, had favoured her.

The driver's momentary astonishment at her request to be taken back to the Look-out was quenched at once in the satisfaction of pocketing a return fare, and she took her seat unquestioned. A mile farther on they met the cart containing the luggage of herself and Mary; and while what belonged to her was being transferred from it to her own vehicle, she took the opportunity of writing a few pencilled lines—in French, to escape Downshire eyes—to Mary:—

'In consequence of a conversation, to which I was an unwilling listener, between your father and Major Melburn this afternoon, there is no course open to me but to leave Burrow Hall. Forgive the uneasiness that my departure must needs have caused you, and the inconvenience which I fear will ensue from it; and, under all circumstances, be assured of my affection. I will write to you from London.'

This explanation, bald and curt as it looked, she felt would be sufficient, and, at the same time, inflict no unnecessary pain. It would be taken for granted by the two ladies that the Squire's resolution to give her 'her *congé* that very day'—to the utterance of which he would be obliged to confess—had been anticipated by her own act; while the Major himself would be at no loss to understand the true reason of her

departure—namely, the revelation of his treachery and falsehood from his own lips.

What his plan had been—if his recklessness and passion had admitted of a plan—it was difficult to say. The subject was one which his proposed victim naturally shrank from speculating upon; but he had probably intended to follow her to London, where, having ingratiated himself—an easy task—more and more into her confidence and affections, he would presently have imposed upon her by a mock marriage.

Humiliating as were the moral aspects of the case, they were hardly less so than those of her financial condition. The very money that was owing to her for her salary, and on which alone she could look for subsistence for the present, seemed to her less like honest earnings than the wages of shame. The idea of accepting a similar post to that which she had filled at Burrow Hall had become abhorrent to her; to live on the scanty means of Aunt Jane, even for a day, was not to be thought of: and nothing, therefore, remained to her but to seek for a situation in some seminary, such as she had filled before, and had left with such a sense of enfranchisement. How she had beaten her wings against the bars, and pined for open air; and now, having tasted of it—only at Casterton, however; for that which she had breathed under the same roof with Jefferson Melburn seemed now mere choke-damp and miasma—she must needs go back to prison, perhaps for the remainder of her days! And she was not yet five-and-twenty!

Her aspirations, too, which had hitherto supported her in all her troubles—nay, the inspiration, as it had almost seemed, which now and again had taken possession of her soul—had vanished. It could not be said that Mr. Argand's letter had flattered it into existence, for it had dwelt within her, in some dim shape, as long as she could remember; but his encouragement had given it form and lent it wings. Though the paper she had written for the 'Millennium' had fallen far short of what she had expected of herself—for who of us who think at all are satisfied with the expression of our thoughts—she had secretly believed it to possess merit far above the common. The flattering unction which the neophyte in literature can in most cases apply to the wound of disappointment as regards 'style' or 'appropriateness to our columns' was denied to her. It was not her first nor her twentieth production: the composition had been as good as she could make it, while,

though it was true she had read no such similar mingling of description and reflection in the pages of the 'Millennium,' the very speciality of the review was its originality and freedom from convention. The failure of her contribution must therefore have arisen from want of merit. What to any one experienced in such matters was significant of her utter depression was that she did not for a moment question Mr. Argand's judgment in the matter, far less did she dream of imputing a want of kindness to his silence. He evidently thought that his first impression of her powers had been a false one, and that to give her any further encouragement would be an act of cruelty. Mrs. Meyrick would give her lodgment for the night, no doubt, and her fixed intention upon finding herself in her own room was to destroy every manuscript she possessed, and put an end once for all to her false hopes in that direction, as her false hopes in another had been done to death by a more cruel but not more relentless hand. For the rest of her natural life she must make up her mind to be a drudge: a fate accepted with resignation by tens of thousands—but who, for the most part, are born for the cart shafts and have no yearning for cleaving the empyrean with sunlit wings.

The shades of evening began to fall when Miss Dart once more found herself looking down on the little town: it seemed more grey and gloomy than she had ever seen it, but upon the summit of Battle Hill still lingered, golden, the last rays of day.

When the door of the Look-out was opened to her, she saw Mrs. Meyrick standing with anxious face behind the little maid: the unaccustomed sound of wheels stopping at her door had doubtless alarmed her.

She took the new-comer's hand in silence, and led her into a little room at the back of the house, now unused except at preserving seasons, but in which her husband had once kept a lathe, and used as a workshop. 'What, in Heaven's name, has happened?' she inquired in a trembling voice.

'Nothing—at least nothing to any one of consequence,' was the bitter rejoinder. Its sarcasm was lost upon the widow, whose mind was not one of those exceptional ones which are fitted up for the reception of two ideas at the same time.

'My sister-in-law is no worse, then?' she replied, with relief in her tones.

'I believe not; but I have not seen her. I was obliged to come away at once.'

'But why?—oh, why?'

'To prevent being sent away; just as any other servant anticipates dismissal by giving warning.'

'Sent away? I am quite sure you ought never to have been sent away,' exclaimed the kind old lady, indignantly. 'There must have been some plot against you, and Jefferson was at the bottom of it.'

At that name Miss Dart, hitherto as firm and cold as iron, began to tremble. 'Sit you down, girl,' continued the widow, authoritatively, 'and drink this.'

She had opened a cupboard, and taking out a square bottle, the contents of which were solid as well as liquid, had rapidly filled from it a small glass. 'The cherries have no stones in them, and will not hurt you even if you do swallow them; the brandy is thirty years old.'

It is doubtful whether this eulogy would have had much effect but for the appealing look with which it was accompanied. To please her hostess Miss Dart took a sip from the glass, and at once experienced a sense of restoration. She had passed the whole day without food, for she had had no appetite for breakfast, and the emotions she had undergone had exhausted her.

'Thank you,' she murmured, gratefully. 'I feel better now. You have just mentioned a certain person's name. Be so good as to tell me——'

'Not one word will I speak about him, or anybody else, till you have finished the glass.'

There are some things, such as the administration of cordials, in which the weak become the stronger. Miss Dart obeyed.

'Now eat a biscuit.'

This mandate was more difficult of accomplishment. Who of us is so fortunate as not to have known moments when the staff of life is literally broken, and the gorge rises at a crumb of bread?

'If you wish to ask me any questions about Major Melburn, I am ready to answer them,' resumed Mrs. Meyrick, with an air of resignation. 'It is an unpleasant subject to me, as you may have guessed; but if it is absolutely necessary——'

'I wish to ask only one thing,' interrupted Miss Dart. 'Did you know that he was married?'

‘Certainly not.’

‘You would have known it, I suppose, if Mrs. Melburn knew it?’

‘Without doubt I should have known it. My sister-in-law and I have no secrets from each other as respects that person.’

‘Yet it does not seem to surprise you to hear what I have just said.’

‘Not at all. Nothing that I could hear said of my brother’s son would surprise me—my poor dear girl.’

Her first words were wrung from an indignant woman denouncing, unwillingly, her own flesh and blood; her last, were the expression of tenderest sympathy with the misfortune of one she loved. Miss Dart had suddenly burst into tears, and covered her face with her hands. Mrs. Meyrick made no effort to restrain her companion’s grief. Like a doctor, slow to diagnose the disease of his patient, but who, having once discovered it, is at no loss how to treat it, she remained quiet and collected, save that her own eyes were wet with tears.

‘I had no idea how things were with you, my darling,’ she said, presently, ‘or I would have spoken long ago. You are, doubtless, asking yourself, “Why did not Mrs. Melburn, who was in a better position than I for seeing how matters were going on, utter no note of warning?” To explain that, I must tell you what is known to none but herself and me—not even to her own daughter. Yes,’ she continued, as if to herself, ‘I owe it to Edith as well as to you, though the confidence is a painful one. Long years ago, when you were a little child, and it could never have been guessed how such a matter could have affected you, my sister-in-law, then a young and very pretty girl, met Jefferson Melburn at a ball. It was in some garrison town where his regiment was quartered, and their acquaintanceship was of the slightest: nevertheless, I believe, he proposed to her and was rejected. The affair—or at least that was how it was represented to me—was of so transient a nature that it made hardly any impression on her. When Mr. Melburn, the elder, offered himself, the recollection of what had happened gave her some embarrassment; but Jefferson was at that time in India, and not expected home for years; he had had, moreover, a quarrel with the Squire, and it was generally understood that he would never come to Burrow Hall; and, as you know, she

became Mrs. Melburn. Then, matters turned out quite differently—and, as generally happens, much worse. Jefferson came to England on sick-leave; his quarrel with his father was made up—though they will never be friends—by some arrangement about the entail on the estate; and Jefferson came home. My sister-in-law had never liked him, and his former liking for her had now changed to detestation. Outwardly, he maintained a cold and deferential respect for her, but he has never lost an opportunity of doing her a mischief, or of fomenting the unhappy differences that arose between her husband and herself. Revengeful and utterly unscrupulous as she knew him to be, figure to yourself what life must have been to her for the last twenty years, at the mercy of this man's slanderous tongue! When I hear people talk so glibly of the wrath to come, as of something new and strange, can they know, I wonder, that in this world already there are poor souls, not altogether wicked ones, who have found their Gehenna!' She paused a moment, overcome with emotion, and transfigured in her companion's eyes from the commonplace, kind creature she had hitherto known to something almost heroic in her divine compassion. 'Judge, then, dear Lizzie, was it possible for this unhappy woman, even if she knew what—as I guess—was taking place between you and this man, that she could have spoken out against him? On the other hand, had she known that he was married, I do believe that no personal considerations, however weighty——'

'Enough, enough,' exclaimed Miss Dart, falling on the widow's neck, and mingling her tears with hers; 'forgive me, that, in my selfish folly, supposing myself to be the most miserable woman in the world, instead of being merely the most blind and foolish, I have caused you so much distress and pain. Your confidence, be assured, is not misplaced; and, as for mine, whatever is worth your hearing of my wretched story shall be told at once.' Then, in few words, she told her all that had happened, concealing nothing of the worship she had paid to her idol, with its feet—nay, with its whole being—of worthless clay; and concluding with a statement of her own poor position and barren prospects.

'Well, well,' said her kind hostess, encouragingly, when she had quite done, 'you must come and live with us till you see your way to placing yourself in comfortable quarters. As to ways and means—for I know you are the most practical young woman (outside that weakness which is common to all

our sex) that ever cut out a gown or made a bonnet as well as any milliner—you must remember that your presence here is, to begin with, the saving of a doctor's bill: even during the twelve hours that you have been away, dear Mat has already begun to show signs of running down, like a clock that has lost its winder. Then, your marketing is so much better than mine or Lucy's.'

'Pray, pray, don't tempt me, dear Mrs. Meyrick!' interrupted Miss Dart, in agonised tones. 'I have already suffered from the pretence and shadow of love: let me not also suffer from its substance. What you so hospitably propose would, indeed, be a cruel kindness. There is nothing for me now—unless I would sink into the mire of mere despondency and despair—but work: work with my fingers, if nothing better offers—work for a few pence if not for a few pounds—but work I must have, of some kind, at once. All that I am here to ask of you is a lodging for the night and the loan of my fare to town to-morrow.'

'As you please, dear Lizzie,' replied the widow, 'or, rather, as you will, and must. I am well aware that I am quite incompetent to advise you. I must go to Mat, and break to him what has happened: it will be a bitter blow.'

'Oh, Mrs. Meyrick, spare him! spare him!'

'How can I? How is it possible? Do you suppose that the sorrow of one he loves can be hidden from him? He has only to look at you.'

'I should never have come here,' murmured Miss Dart, bitterly. 'My very presence diffuses wretchedness. Give me at least a few minutes to wash away these traces of weakness.'

'You have half an hour good,' said Mrs. Meyrick, looking at her watch. 'He is in the pavilion, and will know nothing till dinner time of your arrival. There is a letter for you somewhere; it came by the afternoon's post. I will send it up to your room.'

'A letter from Aunt Jane, no doubt,' thought Miss Dart, wearily. 'She little guesses that I have been to Burrow Hall, and have now left it for ever; that I am coming home to her to-morrow to be another burden to her bowed-down back.'

Ten minutes had passed, and Mrs. Meyrick was standing on the well-worn steps outside the dining-room, where the maid was laying the little table for three; she had been cud-

gelling her brains for what to say to Matthew that should give him the least amount of pain, and with small advantage—the winter water grows no warmer for the would-be swimmer's contemplation of it—when suddenly, from the open window overhead, a voice cried, 'Do not trouble to tell Matthew, Mrs. Meyrick. I will speak to him myself.'

If the good lady had been a student of the poets, like her son, it is probable that, at the sound of it, certain verses would have occurred to her descriptive of the linnet's song—

And unto one her note is gay,
And now her little ones have ranged;
And unto one her note is changed,
Because her brood is stolen away.

Ten minutes ago, the voice she heard had been heavy with woe! now, it was unmistakably clear and bright; not cheerful merely—as a woman in despondency can make it for another's sake—but with the true bird-note of joy. She looked up and beheld a face radiant with hope—nay, with happiness. 'Not one word to him of what has happened,' whispered the smiling lips. 'It will not now be necessary.'

'But what will you tell him, my child?'

'Good news, dear Mrs. Meyrick; nothing but good news.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONGRATULATIONS.

THERE are comfortable saws and sayings concerning the limits of human woe which it is to be hoped have some truth in them. 'The darkest hour is before dawn,' and 'When things are at their worst they must needs mend,' are samples of them. It is, unhappily, sometimes difficult to say which hour is darkest, or to affirm with accuracy at what point things have reached their worst. There are some cases—even many cases—where Fate is desperately malignant, and '“Unmerciful disaster” never draws rein.' But to the majority of us, though it is difficult to believe that 'The shadow on the dial proves the passing of the trial, proves the presence of the sun,' it may, I think, be said that after the tempest comes, not only calm, but sunshine; that there is some sort of compensation for most of us even in this world.

Elizabeth Dart was not one given to exaggerate her woes. She recognised, even in her misery, that many a woman was not only worse off than herself, as the phrase goes, but had far deeper cause for tears. Was not Mrs. Melburn, for example—of whom, in her ignorance, she had been inclined sometimes to think hard things—one far more to be pitied? Nor was she so foolish as to attempt to disarm misfortune by picturing it to herself as having come to the length of its tether. The very letter now in her hand might bring tidings of illness from Aunt Jane (in the disorganised and morbid condition of her nerves, it seemed only too probable), and infuse still more of bitterness into her cup. Still, that cup was well-nigh full. To be a drudge, and an unsmiling drudge, for life, was the best prospect that life afforded her. She took the letter from Janet's hands with a sigh, half of apprehension, half of despondency. It was not from Aunt Jane, but from Mr. Argand. She tore it open, less in expectation than in fear to encourage expectation which should leave her more hopeless than before, and out leaped a cheque for twenty pounds. The blood rushed to her face as though it had received a blow. Charity—compensation for disappointment—was her explanation of the phenomenon. She took up the cheque with her fingers as though they had been a pair of tongs, and placed it on the table before her. The letter that accompanied it was a long one, as letters must needs be which apologise for a kindness that may well be mistaken for an insult. She had heard of such misplaced generosity before, in similar cases, and the writer's heart must have been touched by her forlorn condition (which he must have guessed at, however, by the magic of sympathy, since it was certain she had never hinted at it), while his judgment had condemned her contribution:—

‘My dear Madam,—You have, I fear, been thinking me sadly negligent; but a severe and sudden illness, an attack of low fever, must be my excuse for not having written to you long ago. My last act and deed in health was to send your admirable article to the printers. I have never seen it since, until I read it in the “Millennium” to-day—a circumstance which (if you knew my editorial habits, which never permit a proof to be in the reading) would have all the force of a medical certificate. Strange to say, it has scarcely ever been out of my thoughts. A hundred times, as I tossed on my restless pillow, have I been at Casterton, on the marsh, on the

pier, and in the quaint little town. I have seen the racehorses, clothed or unclothed, at their exercises and at their trial gallops, on the windy downs. I have fought against the Danes, and with them (for delirium has no patriotism) on Battle Hill; I have seen the towns that lie beneath the sea, in your enchanted neighbourhood, and peopled them with inhabitants who have suffered no sea change. What all this phantasmagoria meant as regards your contribution was of course clear enough to me, and needed no corroboration from without. Still, it will interest you to learn that one of her Majesty's judges—almost the only one in these days who has any claim to be considered a judge in literary matters—has just been calling on me, under the transparent pretence of inquiring after my health, but in reality to learn who is John Javelin.

"Are you aware, my dear sir," he was so good as to say, "that in the net of your 'Millennium' this month (I will not say owing to your absence from your duties, but in spite of it) there shines and shimmers one of those very rare fish called a genius?" "I am well aware of it, my lud," was my ungracious reply. "I dare say, however, you will be careful not to encourage unreasonable expectations by letting the gentleman know your opinion of him," was his dry rejoinder. A sarcasm which, I hope, you will do me the justice to say was unmerited.

"It reminded me, however, of what, but for my illness, would assuredly not have been forgotten—namely, to express to you the very great admiration I feel for "A Bit of Old England" and its author. It is easy to invest with interest an uncommon subject, but to make a trite one even acceptable is a feat beyond most pens. Your little paper will delight every eye that reads it and possesses the faculty of appreciation. As a mere piece of description, it is perfect—as good as Kingsley's sketches of North Devon scenery. The stores of knowledge which it has laid under contribution for its illustration must strike every one as unusually ample; but to one who, like myself, is acquainted with your age and sex, they are indeed amazing. The chief, and much more uncommon, merit of the paper lies, however, in its suggestiveness; in the ordinary reader, it must needs beget thought and reflection, which will be sure to leave him a wiser man than they found him; but for the more exceptional one, from his lordship the judge aforesaid down to the humble editor who now addresses

you, it possesses also a suggestiveness as respects the writer, and endows her with far greater powers even than she has exhibited. "This is promise rather than performance," is a professional phrase which editors find convenient for mitigating the importunities of youthful aspirants; but in your case it must be varied. There is plenty of performance in your work, but also a promise far beyond it, and of which, to speak truth without flattery, I can hardly trust myself to write. To say that you will do far better work than "A Bit of Old England," though of its kind it is impossible to conceive anything better, would be to utter a platitude; indeed, in your own mind, you must well be convinced of the fact. Let me rather predict that you will soon do your talents justice on a wider canvas. In my ignorance of much that I would gladly know concerning your position and prospects, and especially what you yourself consider to be your qualifications for a literary career, I shrink from giving you advice; but it seems to me you are wasting on a narrow field such powers of observation as nature grants only to a very few in the same generation. After all these eulogiums, I am afraid the enclosed cheque will appear miserably inadequate. You will think of the fruitseller of Constantinople with his "In the name of the Prophet—Figs!" You must understand, however, that the "Millennium," though thriving, is in its minority, and has not, at present, the means at its disposal to reward genius according to its deserts.—With every kind wish, I am, my dear madam, yours most faithfully and hopefully,

'FELIX ARGAND.'

Great is the power of deserved praise. It frees the imprisoned Hope, and turns the key on its gaolers, black-browed Care and tyrannous Need. No touch of fairy wand could have effected a transformation more complete than did these words of encouragement in the bosom of Elizabeth Dart. They seemed to give wings to her very being—or rather, they gave her confirmation strong and positive that it had wings. Depressed and downtrodden by circumstance, she had of late begun to doubt her possession of certain gifts of Nature which had from time to time given sign of their presence; but now she felt assured that they were hers.

The good man is ignorant of his goodness, or surprised to hear that others call it by such a name; but in intellectual matters, the case is different: it is probable that every one

who possesses exceptional attainments is more or less conscious of their existence. The sense of comparison, which is not absent from even the most modest natures, renders it impossible that it should be otherwise. The recognition from outside is only corroboration. Nevertheless, it brings on the birth.

A glow of confidence—something different and far better than the awakening of ambition—pervaded Miss Dart's mind. 'How happy shall I be able to make Aunt Jane!' was her first unpresumptuous thought; for, whether she had genius or not, it was certain, as Mrs. Meyrick had said, that she was practical in her ideas. That she was already so happy in herself may need a word of explanation. A woman who has just had her idol shattered should not, it may be suggested, have derived such exceeding satisfaction from the receipt of twenty pounds; but it was precisely because it was shattered, and not a fragment of worth or comeliness left of it, that she felt so buoyant. She had not lost a lover, for it was plain she never had one; she had escaped from a scoundrel of whom no remembrance was left to her, save of his perfidy. Instead of being tossed about the stormy waves of life on the wreck of her poor fortunes, she had suddenly come upon smooth water and a harbour.

As for the cheque—which, my lady reader is thinking, with a smile, will just pay for her winter mantle—I am aware that it did not represent much; still (for comparison comes in here, too), it represented exactly one quarter of the annual income which Miss Dart was wont to receive from the practice of her scholastic profession; and she had gained it by a few hours of mental toil. Compared with the other contents of Mr. Argand's envelope, it was indeed of small intrinsic consequence; but, as an earnest of what hereafter might be won by her pen, it was pregnant with possibilities; and, if they took at present but the concrete form of 'making Aunt Jane happy,' it was, at least, a something.

I think, upon the whole, in short, that that change of tone in which Miss Dart has just exclaimed, 'Good news, dear Mrs. Meyrick! Nothing but good news' was justified.

At the same time, it was difficult to explain to that lady exactly what had happened; even if Mr. Argand's letter was not to be considered—as Miss Dart was inclined to hold it—a confidential communication, it was not, as the phrase goes, 'everybody's letter'; to Mrs. Meyrick, it would be hardly in-

telligible, and would certainly lack that significance and blossom of promise which it possessed for its recipient. To be told that her guest had had literary employment offered her in London would scarcely account to that good lady for the rise that had taken place in the barometer of her young friend's spirits; even in the case of an unquestionable genius and original poet—namely, her son Matthew—the emolument received for literary labour had struck the widow as inconsiderable, and how much less must (naturally) be given to any other writer—and for mere prose. To Miss Dart, however, no other course presented itself, though in the face of high-wrought expectation, but to tender this weak solution of the mystery of her change of spirits.

'Well, of course, my dear,' said Mrs. Meyrick, wondering at the colour in those cheeks which a few minutes ago had been so pale, and at the brightness that had replaced the dew in those gentle eyes. 'I am glad if you are glad; but if it is only because Mr. Argand has printed the account you tell me you have written of Casterton, and which I am sure I shall be most pleased to read——'

'He has not only printed it, but paid for it,' interrupted the authoress, in desperation, but not without a comical sense of disappointment at the manner in which her news had been received; 'he has sent me twenty pounds for it,' and she produced the cheque like one who plays his last card.

'Twenty pounds!' echoed Mrs. Meyrick, examining the document with eyes not wholly free from suspicion. 'Twenty pounds for a description of Casterton?' with a ludicrous stress upon the word, as though she was not certain that the whole fee simple of the town had not been disposed of; 'why, the "Millennium" must be made of money.'

'That is a good many people's notion of the "Millennium,"' answered Miss Dart, laughing.

'But it must be true, my dear,' was the grave rejoinder. 'I don't say a word against your talent for description; but I am so dreadfully afraid there must be some mistake. Why, how long did you take to write it?'

'Well, the mere writing of it took me about six hours.'

'Gracious mercy on me! Why, that's twenty pounds a day—six thousand pounds a year exclusive of Sundays; and I do hope, my dear, whatever they offer you, that you will never work on Sundays.'

Her appeal had a piteous earnestness about it which Miss

Dart comprehended at once, and which robbed it of its absurdity. She remembered that the widow had told her how her late husband's working at his busts on Sunday had been the sole cause of disagreement that had ever arisen between them.

'I don't think working on Sunday will be necessary,' said Miss Dart, smiling, 'if I make six thousand a year on weekdays. But don't you think that I have now a good excuse for Matthew for my having left Burrow Hall and given up governing in favour of Grub Street?'

'Of course, you have; and, as it happens, he need never know that Mr. Argand's letter found you here; for ever since you and Mary went this morning, the poor lad has shut himself up in the pavilion, and never asked a question about the post or anything.'

It may be asked, with incredulity, 'But was so intelligent a young gentleman as Matthew Meyrick taken in by this pious and simple fraud to save him pain; and did not the abruptness of the governess's return from Burrow Hall awaken his suspicions?'

For the moment—that is to say, till their visitor's retirement for the night left him free to question his mother on the whole subject, when the truth, of course, came out—the explanation did satisfy him. That implied invitation from Mr. Argand to come, like a literary Whittington, to seek her fortune in town, seemed to him of the nature of a royal command, which, under the same circumstances, he would have himself obeyed without a moment's delay. Unlike Miss Dart, who was a student of human nature first, and a *littérateur* afterwards, he put letters before everything. In view of that flattering epistle from the Jupiter of the 'Millennium,' all minor matters—including the very existence of such a person as Jefferson Melburn—were dwarfed, and disappeared. In his extreme delight at Miss Dart's good fortune, and in the recognition of the talents which had so long aroused his own amazement by one so capable of judgment as Mr. Argand, he even for a moment omitted to inquire, 'And what does Mary say, and how will she do without you?' This question, which could not have been long postponed, was providentially averted by the dropping in of Mr. Leyden to dinner. He had heard of Miss Dart's sudden return—within an hour of its occurrence it had, indeed, become the talk of the little town—and its true cause had at once suggested itself to him. 'That scoundrel

Jefferson,' was his private reflection, 'must have shown his hand, or rather his cloven foot.'

The antiquary's regard for Miss Dart, and the keen interest he took in her affairs, must be his excuse; but the fact was, curiosity to know how she had discovered the real character of the Major consumed him. The explanation she gave of her sudden return to Casterton seemed to afford him complete satisfaction; but, in reality, in Mrs. Meyrick's face he read ample confirmation of his own views. He saw how the land lay, in short, almost as completely as though he had had a chart of it; and he proved of immense assistance in averting the conversation from dangerous topics. To judge by the talk, indeed, in that little dining-room, one would have imagined it was a publisher's parlour in Paternoster Row, with the hostess as a sleeping partner. Nor was the subject-matter—the prospects of a literary life—one whit less interesting because not one of the company had any knowledge of it; information on the point would only have clipped the wings of their imagination, or, perhaps, even plucked them.

As to material results, the estimate arrived at by Mrs. Meyrick, though not exceeded, was held to be reasonable and, on the whole, satisfactory, save by Miss Dart herself.

'If my income ever reaches a thousand pounds,' she modestly observed, 'I think, Mr. Leyden, that the stars will have justified themselves.'

'Certainly not, my dear young lady,' was the confident rejoinder. 'Literature will do all it can for you, no doubt; but the stars, you may take my word for it, don't put themselves out—I mean, interfere in human affairs—for a thousand a year.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

A NEW DEPARTURE.

MISS DART gave way with little reluctance to Mrs. Meyrick's earnest entreaties that she should remain at the Look-out another day. She was among such friends as she was not likely to find elsewhere, and whom she would, perhaps, never see again. She felt the need of an interval of rest after that day of incident and emotion, and before she commenced a life which, with all its promise, must be new and strange. It was also necessary, of course, that Aunt Jane, though she had no

preparations to make for her reception, should be apprised of her coming and its cause. Besides, there were two other letters, of even more importance, to be despatched, such as could be more conveniently written in that peaceful place and time than after the conclusion of a journey, or in the confusion of an arrival.

One of them was to Mary Melburn, the other to Mr. Argand. The former was far the shorter, and yet by no means brief. It was not necessary to tell so near and dear a friend that nothing short of dire necessity had compelled her abrupt desertion of her, under circumstances in which she could so ill be spared; and to write of the Major's conduct she could not compel her pen; it was a humiliation for her to recall his name. The whole explanation of his deceit and treachery she left to Mrs. Meyrick—to be sent by the same post to her sister-in-law—with a well-founded confidence that it would lose none of its baseness in the telling. She took it for granted that Mary would understand that her separation from Burrow Hall was complete and final; but of the lasting nature of her love for her late pupil and companion she gave full assurance.

‘That there is no need for these protestations, my dear Mary,’ she wrote, ‘I am well aware; I make them only because it is a selfish pleasure to do so; but, as to your mother, it is only too necessary to express my very high regard and respect for her, and my gratitude for all her kindness. Whatever errors and follies I may seem to have committed under her roof, there is none that I so deeply reproach myself with as my misapprehension of her gentle and noble nature. I sometimes thought her cold and constrained to me, when, as I now perceive, there must have seemed to her much in my conduct deserving of the severest censure. It would be impertinence in me to address her personally on such a topic, but I pray you to let her know what distress of mind this reflection causes me. In what anxiety and alarm you may be at this moment on her account, I dare not picture to myself, and yet, as she herself will tell you, I cannot be with you. I go to London to-morrow to begin life afresh, under good auspices.’ (Here followed an account of her literary prospects.) ‘But, whether failure or success attend me, I shall never forget you, or fail to sympathise with your joys and sorrows. To-day, as I feel too well, your sky is dark, and your horizon darker still. Alas! I can only give you my prayers. With

what dread and fear shall I open your letter to-morrow night (for I know you have written), and yet how thankfully shall I welcome it ! ’

To Mr. Argand she was as frank as she had hitherto been reticent. She made no attempt to restrain the expressions of gratitude that naturally fell from her pen. She felt as though she were addressing a parent ; for did she not owe to him a new life ? She pictured him to herself a venerable personage, who, laden with the experience of at least half a century of literary toil, still preserved a tender heart, and delighted in the encouragement of budding talent ; a sort of nineteenth-century Dr. Johnson, who might almost have patted her on the head paternally, and called her ‘ my dear ’ without offence. She plainly told him that his letter had decided her to adopt literature as a profession, but at the same time acquitting him of all responsibility in the matter. It was a project she had had in her mind ever since the first moment she began to think, though he had given it shape and solidity. It was only in her enumeration of what she judged to be her qualifications for a literary calling that she omitted, less from modesty than ignorance, to state the whole truth. She had the sagacity to understand that a great deal of the reading to which she had been accustomed, and which is known as ‘ high-class ’ education, is only an encumbrance to the mind. She did not give herself credit for the acumen which had, in fact, enabled her to select from the unwieldy mass what was best and brightest. Most persons of the scholastic class, whether male or female, are apt to load themselves with weighty but unnecessary information, which they drop, like paving-stones, on the toes of their less learned acquaintances, and are therefore shunned, with reason, by society at large. The faculty of intellectual digestion is denied to them ; they belong to that increasing army, not of martyrs, but of those who make martyrs of other people, who are educated above their wits. Miss Dart, a Jack Horner, without his priggish egotism, had picked out the plums from her literary cake : whatever was adapted for illustration or for argument she had retained for use ; and, with an instinct of separation and discernment not inferior to that which is ascribed (not always, unhappily, with truth) to the delicate sensibility of our molars, had rejected the rest. Her views of life, if not original, were untrammelled by convention ; she had already suffered for this in person ; but, on the other hand, they gave a wider range to her ideas, which

offered a curious contrast to the narrow limits of her experience. As regards the last, however, though undoubtedly there is an advantage in 'seasoned brains,' its benefits are liable to be exaggerated. It is possible to have seen a great deal of human life, especially if it is of the same description, and still to remain intensely stupid. Intuition, which is a sort of experience by inspiration, had hitherto supplied its place with Miss Dart; and with such persons, not only does a very little experience, especially if it be only sufficiently various, go a long way, but a very considerable knowledge of human affairs can be acquired by reading. Though the newspaper had been in the *Index Expurgatorius* while she was a pupil, when she became a teacher she had been free to read it; and she had, with her usual judgment in the matter of selection, taken full advantage of the permission. By this means she had made herself well acquainted with political and social matters that are commonly but little studied by persons of her age and sex; she took an interest in them, indeed, which was almost phenomenal, and, reversing the usual formula, might have been well described as 'of the world, although not in it.'

Introspection, however, was not easy to her, for she was far too natural to be self-conscious; and she found that in writing of herself to Mr. Argand—which she felt it due to him to do—she had undertaken a difficult task. She withheld from him, in ignorance, much that it was important to him to know; but only in one thing did she mislead him. 'I am afraid,' she wrote, 'that I have no imagination'—a statement which had its consequences. She made it in all simplicity; but, as a matter of fact, she had often amused herself—having no other means of recreation—by imagining an Elizabeth Dart in quite other circumstances than her real ones, and surrounded by beings of her own creation, as different from her acquaintances in the flesh as fancy could form them. Of this practice she had anything but a high opinion, and, in fact, was ashamed of it: it came under the category of day-dreams, and was to be discouraged.

In conclusion, Miss Dart made no apology for inflicting these details upon her correspondent—for had he not requested them of her?—but, though giving her London address, she begged him to spare himself the trouble of a reply. 'You have given me at least as much encouragement as is good for me,' she wrote, 'and there is no fear that the grateful soil

will not produce a harvest; though whether it be worth the reaping, it will be for you to judge.'

By that morning's post the copy of the 'Millennium' containing Miss Dart's paper arrived at the Look-out, and, in spite of her protest, was read aloud by Roger Leyden to the rest.

'I had no idea what an interesting place we lived in,' was Mrs. Meyrick's remark on it.

'My picture does not strike you, then, as very like the original?' observed Miss Dart; not on the whole, perhaps, a very happy rejoinder; but she was hampered with a sense of embarrassment from which no young author whose work is the subject of discussion in her own presence can be wholly free.

'Nay, I think it is more like than the original,' was the naïve reply. 'You have made me recognise beauties in its dear old face which had hitherto escaped me, and I seem to love it in consequence more than ever.'

'Let us have no more criticism after that,' said Roger Leyden, triumphantly; 'Mrs. Meyrick has gone to the root of the matter.'

'It was hardly possible to go wrong with such materials,' observed Miss Dart, modestly: 'even a journeyman who is so fortunate as to find the best Carrara ready to his practised hand must turn out something to be admired; there is always the marble; and I am sure, but for you, Mr. Leyden, one half of my sketch at least would not have been written.'

'You have touched nothing, my dear young lady, that you have not adorned,' answered the antiquary, not gallantly, but in tones of quiet conviction. 'What do you think, Matthew?'

'I am thinking, if the writer of that delightful paper is a journeyman,' sighed Matthew, 'what am I?'

'Considering the quarter from which it comes—a gentleman "who writes himself," as Sheridan says,' remarked Roger Leyden, clapping his hands, 'I think that ought to content you, Miss Dart: eulogiums can no further go.'

It may be thought that the approval of private friends upon a literary effort does not count for much. But, at all events, it is a rare kind of praise. If a prophet is held in small honour among his own belongings, an author is commonly held in no honour at all. Those of his own household, or his immediate neighbours, are the last to perceive his

merit; it is only when it has received public recognition that they swell the note of praise. It seems curious, even to themselves, that, 'though they lived next door,' they 'never knew this famous man before.' A good many first works, it is true, have been published, if their author is to be believed, at the 'request of friends'; but that is at least as often the offspring of imagination as the productions themselves. In the present case, these critics on the hearth, though they were but three, were unusually representative: the antiquary, the poet, and Mrs. Meyrick, each belonged to a very different class from the others; and their common opinion was, therefore, all the more propitious. Indeed, had she remained at Casterton, there would have been reason to fear for Miss Dart, at the very outset of her career, the unhappy fate which only too often befalls the veteran of letters—under the focus of an admiring clique to become ashes, in which his 'wonted fires' do not live.

The dangerous ordeal was, however, in her case very brief; and the flattery of the little circle was soon forgotten in its kindness. The wrench of parting with her Casterton friends was far greater than it had seemed the day before, when she had been going on a shorter journey, and to dwell with those who had a near connection with themselves. She might now be bidding them good-bye for ever!

The farewell interview between Matthew and herself was affectionate, and even tender; but their talk was not of one another. He spoke of his love for Mary, and of its hopelessness, in a manner that wrung her heart; yet she could not but rejoice that he had so spoken to her—it was the highest compliment, she felt, that friendship could pay.

Mrs. Meyrick embraced her with tears and kisses. If good wishes were a burden, she would have sunk under the load. Who was she, and what had she done, she asked of herself, to be treated with such confidence and affection?

At the railway station, miles away, the first to meet her, as she stepped out of the fly, was Roger Leyden, a man who always avoided all places, as she knew, where men do congregate.

It was the first time in her lonely life that any one had troubled himself to 'see her off' by the train; and it touched her very much.

'It is nothing but selfishness on my part,' protested the antiquary. 'I worship the rising sun. You will one day

travel as princes (and railway directors) do, by "a special." The stars have said it.' Then, as he pressed her hand at the carriage-window, 'You will not forget your friends at the Look-out, I know. Write to poor Matthew now and then—you will be the only link between him and the world without.'

It was this, she felt, that he had come to impress upon her; for his love for the lad was great.

Hitherto, her journeys (and some of them had been long ones) had been dull enough; her thoughts had been without speculation. But now it was far otherwise; the horizon of her life had been enlarged; her future was full of hope.

Presently, she arrived at the junction, where she had alighted on her way to Burrow Hall. She shrank back into a corner of the compartment, lest by some chance Major Melburn should be there. She was as safe from his intrusion as though she had been in a balloon. He was one of those men whom it is inconceivable to imagine in a second-class carriage; but it was possible he might be on the platform. That danger past, her thoughts reverted to those connected with him. How were matters going with Mrs. Melburn and poor Mary? she wondered. Was it possible that to the girl's other troubles was added the hateful presence of Mr. Winthrop? The Major, indeed, had assured her that it would not be so; but his word was as worthless as himself.

How wretched was the position of those two women, which she had at one time imagined to be enviable! If there are compensations in one lot, there are drawbacks in another: only it is Heaven which sends the former, and man who too often creates the latter.

But for that serpent, Jefferson Melburn, Burrow Hall might have been, if not an Eden, at least a happy home. How much better would it be for the world if that 'Bill for the Abolition of Scoundrels' could be passed which one of her favourite authors had declared to be so indispensable! She found herself drawing a comparison between the Major and her unknown friend, Mr. Argand; both, perhaps, with equal gifts, but one of whom had used and the other misused them. Had the one man, she wondered, been always inclined to good, and the other to evil? The religious world, or a portion of it, had a theory that a man receives his call direct and on a sudden from Heaven: was it possible that a call could come from the other direction with equal abruptness? Could Jefferson Melburn have ever said his prayers at his

mother's knee; have experienced the enthusiasms and illusions of youth; and now, all of a sudden, become unwholesome and corrupt? Or had he been born bad? She knew the proverb, 'Nemo repente,' &c., and even its free translation by the rather unjust judge ('It takes five years to make an attorney'); but she was not one to accept proverbs with passive submission. Upon the whole, she was inclined to picture the man as a Mephistopheles. She dismissed him from her mind with a shudder, and turned her thoughts to his antithesis—as she imagined him—Felix Argand. What sort of person, she wondered, was he in appearance? A man probably advanced in years, and 'crowned with reverence and the silver hair'? She could never tell him how much he had done for her, or how grateful she was to him; but, if ever she had the opportunity, she would tell his wife. How proud that wife must be of him!

In the midst of these speculations, which had devoured the way for her, the houses sprang up like magic on either side, each with its little strip of garden running down to the railway line like brooks to a river. The train began to slacken speed, and the well-known roar of London to greet her ears. It seemed to have a wider and a deeper meaning for them than it had ever had heretofore.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE MARYLEBONE ROAD.

AT what date the road called 'New' in London may have had a right to bear that title, I have no idea, but it was presumably at an epoch when architecture was not in its most flourishing condition. It is, perhaps, for a thoroughfare of such pretensions, the least cheerful to be found in the metropolis; yet, to have an end is denied to it. At different stages of its melancholy career, it has, indeed, adopted various titles; but the 'long, unlovely street' never loses its identity. For the most part, it has no shops; but now and then a deviser of memorials for the dead has turned his strip of garden into a graveyard full of cenotaphs. Those, however, who dwell in that western portion of this locality, termed the Marylebone Road, are uncheered by these mementos; there is nothing to remind them in it that there is any termination to their monotonous

existence. Formerly there was, doubtless, more life in the street; but all its traffic has been absorbed by the Metropolitan Railway, and is now carried underground. There are gratings through which the astonished stranger suddenly sees columns of steam arise as from a geyser, which makes still denser the atmosphere around. On a wet Sunday, indeed, to one who finds himself, for the first time, in this *Arabia deserta* it seems amazing to behold so many iron railings and not a single suicide depending from them.

Mankind, however, is mentally very independent of local circumstance, and it is probable that there are as many happy households, in proportion, in murky Newcastle as in that sunlit Isle of Wight, which we call, not inappropriately, the garden of England.

Aunt Jane (Mrs. Richter), for whose hospitable roof (for her lodgings were at the top of the house) Miss Elizabeth Dart was bound, dwelt in the Marylebone Road, and never found the locality to affect her spirits; neither did the weather, nor even the east wind. As science now packs its electricity for nightly use, so she kept within her a store of sunshine which was permanent and inexhaustible. The objects on which it shone were few, but that was not her fault; her heart had warmth enough for a world. Even her landlady, Mrs. Birk, who was not of a material which naturally absorbs heat and light of that sort, shared it; so did her own little maid, Annie; so did her cat, Apollinaris. It was so called, not after the famous drinking water, but the Syrian bishop of that name, whose life and works her late husband had edited with great applause, but unhappily at his own expense. The Rev. Tristram Richter had been a scholar of great erudition, and might probably have proved the excellence of learning when house and land were gone and spent (in publishing) had time permitted, but he had died in the plenitude of his theological honours almost penniless. More fortunate than many of his cloth, however, he had not left his widow with encumbrances, and with the fragment of his fortune and a small annuity which remained to her, she might have lived comfortably enough in some humble cottage of the Devonshire village of which he had been the vicar, and which she loved for his sake and for its own, but for the sudden death of her brother, Thomas Dart, a lieutenant on half-pay; this gentleman left her all he had to leave—his only child, Elizabeth. Under such circumstances some persons would have declined

to administer, but Aunt Jane would always have it that no one had ever received a handsomer legacy.

For the education of the girl, in such a manner that she might gain her own living when the annuity should terminate, the widow at once came up to town. No one ever knew what it cost her to leave that grave in the sunny churchyard, and all the memories that hung about it with the creepers and the flowers. It was a sacrifice that sent up no incense save to the All-seeing Eye. If her dear Lizzie had not had a will far stronger than her own, she would have kept her long after she was of an age to keep herself, and never grudged the cost, which, small as it was, her scanty means could ill afford; but the girl's natural hunger for books was whetted by a desire for independence; not that she felt the weight of obligation, laid on her by the hand of love as lightly as a flower, but that she yearned to prove herself not unworthy of the pains bestowed upon her. At an age much earlier than such posts are usually obtained, she became teacher at the ladies' college at which she had been pupil; and, but for the entreaties of the principal, who understood her value, would have gone out as a governess long before she had volunteered her services to Mrs. Melburn. Having once removed the burden of her maintenance from Aunt Jane's shoulders, it was no wonder that Lizzie had regarded her withdrawal from her late position with shrinking reluctance; or that she had hailed with such thankfulness and joy the new career that had so promisingly presented itself; but, as for Aunt Jane herself, the idea that she had got rid of a responsibility never even so much as crossed her mind. That Lizzie was in good spirits about something or other, which she herself did not understand, save that it had some connection with writing for a magazine, was of course a gratifying circumstance; but what delighted her, and filled her mind to the exclusion of all speculation, was the thought that Lizzie was coming back to her much sooner than she could reasonably have expected, and was even probably to remain at home for good. To say that her four rooms were swept and garnished for her niece's reception would have been a reflection on Annie's handiwork, by whom they were always kept in a state of cleanliness only seen elsewhere in gaols and lighthouses; but certain arrangements were made of an exceptional and triumphal kind. The doorstep of the house, which only so far belonged to her that she had a right to step on it, was washed and scrubbed—an

operation which had not taken place within the memory of any inmate of the establishment; half-a-dozen flowers in pots were purchased of a peripatetic flower-seller and placed in the front windows while in Lizzie's own little room there was hung on the whitewashed walls, like a tablet, a card with 'Welcome Home' upon it, painted by Aunt Jane's own hands. The widow had her gifts, among which was a taste for decoration in colours, which as applied to birthday cards, and even doyleys, she had been wont to think highly of till she had tested its market value: it was the one modest attempt she had made to add to her resources, and, having proved a failure, it now only served to amuse her leisure hours. Accomplishments, no matter what they may cost to acquire, are the most unsaleable of all commodities. Still, Mrs. Richter had good cause to be thankful, having no great turn for books, that, after certain daily duties among the poor in neighbouring Lisson Grove were over, she could sit down before her cottage-piano, or before her little easel, and forget the lonely time. The widow, by nature chatty and cheerful, had found enjoyment in such society as her Devonshire home afforded; but now in all the wide world of London there was no one she could call her friend. She did not repine; it was only as if between her and her fellow-creatures, save her Lizzie only, a door had been softly closed; but she had her moments of wistful recollection.

Mrs. Richter was still, for a widow, young; and if she had lost much of the quiet beauty for which she had once been remarkable, she had acquired other, if less obvious, charms—the impress of a blameless life, and of a mind that occupies itself in thought for others, could be read in her gentle face and tender eyes. She was a little creature, cast, indeed, in almost a fairy mould, so that Lizzie used to wonder as a child how so much of goodness could be packed in so small a space; her voice was sweet and musical, and, without being at all distinguished-looking, no one who had eyes to see could doubt that Aunt Jane was a gentlewoman. Though she had left off her widow's weeds, her dress was of the simplest, yet she always looked superior to her surroundings. She reminded Lizzie of one of those silver-hued and delicate birds, such as one sees exposed for sale in cramped, rude cages, in low neighbourhoods—captive and out of their element, but full of song.

For half an hour before her niece could reasonably be expected, Aunt Jane was watching for her from the window with

eagerness; the vans and waggons aroused illogical expectation, and every passing cab gave her a pang of disappointment. At last, the long-looked-for vehicle stopped at the gate.

'Run, Annie, run!' cried Aunt Jane, 'and open the door for Miss Lizzie; she has not seen a black face for so long that Susan's may frighten her.'

Susan was one of many Susans who had occupied the post of maid-of-all-work in Mrs. Birk's establishment; she was not, as the widow's words would have seemed to imply, a negress; but constant contact with grimy substances, including black lead, had almost utterly obliterated her native hue. It was, no doubt, more pleasant to Lizzie to be welcomed by a face she knew.

Mrs. Richter's reception of her was little less than ecstatic. 'How lovely you look, my dear!' she murmured between her caresses; 'how fresh and how sweet you are: it is as though the summer itself had come to visit me!'

'That is the flowers,' returned Lizzie, laughing, and producing from her basket a charming bouquet, which Mrs. Meyrick had insisted on her plucking from the garden at the Look-out. She had also selected some seaweed from the shore that morning, for she knew her aunt's passion for 'the smell of the sea.' It was impossible to imagine simpler offerings; but we do not estimate the gifts of those we love by their value, and Aunt Jane derived as much pleasure from them as any diamond tiara would have given her.

'How charming it was of you to think of me, darling! What exquisite flowers! Oh dear, oh dear' (sniffing as though she would sniff her nose off), 'I seem to be in Devonshire again—and see, here is the seaweed we used to call the barometer. I will hang it up on a nail, and it will tell us what weather is coming as well as anything from Negretti and Zambra's.'

Then there was a banquet—not of herbs, yet certainly one where love was; wherewith Mrs. Birk had nothing to do, but in which Annie, who was admirable at braising a chicken and making bread sauce, had outdone herself. 'I must ask you to carve it, Lizzie, as you always used to do,' said the hostess. She would gladly have spared her guest the trouble, but the fact was her hands were trembling with emotion, and the tears stood in her eyes and interfered with her vision.

'To think that the old days have come again,' she mur-

mured, softly, when the feast was over; and the words were so freighted with thankfulness that they seemed the natural termination of her simple 'Grace.'

'They will be even brighter and better days, I hope,' said Lizzie.

'I don't know. God is very good to me, as it is, my dear. Tell me all about it.'

What she meant was that Lizzie should tell her of her new hopes and expectations. She had already been informed by letter of her niece's reasons for leaving Burrow Hall, and she well understood that was a subject which it would be painful to her to discuss. She knew that the girl had been treated ill—nay, infamously—and her gentle soul had thrilled with indignation upon her account; but she was content to wait till Lizzie chose to speak upon the matter, or to know no more if she chose to be silent. She had not that greediness for painful details which belongs to vulgar natures. Little by little, she did, in fact, hear afterwards all that had happened; the topic was not so painful to the girl as it was abhorrent; but Aunt Jane received it almost without comment; it shocked her general sense of rectitude that such things should be suffered to be done in the world, or that a man like Jefferson Melburn should exist. Even in dispositions the most devout, the idea of misgovernment will suggest itself when Fate ill-uses without cause those who are near and dear to them.

There was no allusion, now, however, as we have said, to the author of Lizzie's woes; the talk between the two women was confined to the bright side of matters; albeit, even there, though there was no embarrassment of course, the girl found it difficult to give a reason for the faith that was in her that should satisfy the hearer. The calling of literature was connected in Mrs. Richter's mind with anything but success. She associated it with the 'Life and Works of Apollinaris,' of which she had made a fair copy for the printer with her own hand. The four handsome volumes of which the work had consisted now stood on her bookshelf, bound expressly for her by the author's orders in grateful acknowledgment of her assistance. Under that very roof she had once beheld a page of it from another copy which had environed a half-pound of Dorset butter. Its recognition had been one of the most painful events of her existence. If her husband's genius had failed to make its mark, or, at all events, to make anything else, what hope could there be for Lizzie?

The stress that her niece laid on the fact that the 'Millennium' was an organ by no means of a fugitive or ephemeral character gave her anything but encouragement. The object of the publication of the 'Life of Apollinaris' had been anything but ephemeral. It had been directed, for its prefix had said so, 'against those false principles of Arianism which were as prevalent now as they had ever been'; there had been nothing fugitive about it save the fate of the work itself. She pictured Mr. Felix Argand as a venerable student; elaborating tomes of theological controversy which were published (very judiciously) in a periodical form, so that the issue might be arrested at any moment.

She was far too tender-hearted to damp her companion's obvious delight in the prospects of a literary career; but she could not help showing that her own expectations of success were by no means so sanguine. When, in despair of getting her to take more cheerful views, Lizzie tried the same experiment that had been so successful with Mrs. Meyrick, by bringing out from her purse eighteen golden sovereigns, the remainder of Mr. Argand's cheque, and placing them in rouleaux on the table, Aunt Jane did, indeed, exhibit considerable astonishment. She had never seen so much money in specie since, as a child, she had been taken over the Bank of England.

'Do you really mean to tell me,' she gasped, 'that Mr. Argand gave you that for a description of Casterton?'

'He did, indeed, and, as I have said, has invited me to become a regular contributor.'

The idea that crossed the widow's mind was that the gentleman must be mad; that his relatives would probably interfere, and the sovereigns have to be refunded; but this suggestion was obviously too uncomplimentary to Lizzie's talents to be expressed.

As truth could not be entirely sacrificed, she compromised the matter.

'Well, it is only to be hoped, my dear,' she said, 'that the man is made of money.'

Lizzie laughed at this naïve misgiving, which was certainly not of a nature to flatter her self-conceit.

'You are evidently supposing, my dear aunt, that Mr. Argand is a wealthy philanthropist whose humour it is to remunerate young authors on a scale of magnificence utterly unjustified by the circumstances of the case. A kinder-hearted

or more generous man I believe it would be difficult to find ; but I do not think it probable—and, indeed, it would be a kindness of a very mistaken sort—that he has purposely misled me as to the pecuniary value of what I have written for him, or may write. If I understand the matter, the “Millennium” is a periodical which has taken a high position in the world of letters, and is not only very valuable as a property, but capable of becoming much more so. Without detracting from Mr. Argand’s generosity (of which I am as conscious as I am of his admirable behaviour to myself and poor Matthew in other respects), I am encouraged to hope that there has been nothing of charity about it, but that my assistance may really be worth the price he puts upon it, and which you are disposed to think a fancy value.’

‘I didn’t say that, dear,’ put in Aunt Jane, hurriedly ; ‘only when I remember what your dear uncle used to receive for his contributions to the “Lady’s Casket,” for which, in his lighter moments, he would occasionally pen a stanza——’

‘But, my dear aunt,’ interrupted Lizzie, with just the least touch of professional irritation, ‘the “Millennium” is not the “Lady’s Casket,” nor anything at all like it. It addresses a very select and intelligent audience ; and though, it is true, it has done me the honour of accepting my little paper, such trivialities (which from one point of view gives me the greater satisfaction) are, as a general rule, altogether out of its line. I believe that I am the first woman that has ever written a line for it.’

The look of admiration with which Aunt Jane received this piece of news was not one of entire approval : she was proud of her niece’s achievement, but just the least bit scandalised by it. It was one thing to have a Hannah More in the family, but quite another to have a Harriet Martineau.

When, a few minutes afterwards, Lizzie produced her copy of the ‘Millennium,’ the name of John Javelin was not to be found in it. She rightly judged that to have written under such a pseudonym would appear to Aunt Jane—a babe, to whom Revalenta Arabica itself would have seemed like strong meat—only a little less audacious than to dress in man’s clothes.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A VISITOR.

THOUGH Elizabeth Dart was no exception to the rule, that, upon the whole, our private affairs are at least as interesting to us as those of other people, she had given many a thought to Mary Melburn since they parted, and looked forward with great anxiety to the news of her which she knew the morning's post would bring. Her apprehensions on her friend's account had, indeed, been almost morbid; and it was quite a relief to her to see that the envelope which contained the communication in question had no black edge. If anything should happen to Mrs. Melburn—and it was only too likely that, within a very short time, it would happen—how painful and perilous would be her daughter's condition! She would not, indeed, be friendless; but her foes would be of her own household. Surrounded with luxury, and with all the supposed advantages of position, how preferable seemed Mary's lot to her own; and yet, in truth, how much less was it to be envied! Her very handwriting had not its customary firmness, and seemed to speak of anxiety and depression.

'My dear, dear Lizzie,' her letter began, 'your pencilled note was the first news I got of your departure, which saved me, doubtless, an agony of apprehension; yet to feel that you have gone, and to know why, seems to fill my cup of misery almost to the brim. At the same time, the thought that you have left this place, with all its painful associations, and are safe with those you love, is a great comfort to me. I am shocked and ashamed that one, unhappily connected with me by so near a tie of blood, should have behaved to you in the manner Aunt Louie's letter, just arrived, reveals to us. That he should have been capable of such conduct does not, alas! surprise me; but of the fact in which his baseness consists I need not tell you that both mamma and I were entirely ignorant. He is gone; and the very atmosphere seems the purer for it. Papa—into whose hands mamma put Aunt Louisa's letter—and he had a stormy parting; and, I trust, we are rid of his presence, and of all belonging to him, for some time to come.

But, Lizzie dear, though we are so far relieved, the Angel of Death is hovering over us. I can no longer conceal from myself that dear mamma is about to leave us. The sense of my coming desolation will, I know, excuse the brevity with which I have spoken above of your departure from us. Great as would be the comfort of your presence, it would be selfish to wish you were with us. It is even selfish in me to mourn for what is about to happen. Not even I can tell what dear mamma has endured for years on my account; but I know that she has spent her life for me—nay, more—that she has striven to prolong it for my sake, when she would rather have been at rest. There are some things which one cannot write or speak about, even to our dearest friends; oh, Lizzie, life to some of us is, indeed, a pitiful story! And if this world should be the end of it, their case would be sad indeed. I try to be quite sure that I shall see her again: with that sweet smile, without its weariness; with those loving eyes, without that yearning which comes into them whenever they rest on me. But even that is hard. Everything seems hard just now. I remember your wise advice; but there are times when “to take short views” is to be most despairing; for, in doing so, one only beholds a grave. She has begged me to ask your forgiveness—I suppose, for not having warned you of a danger which she never suspected—and in such a voice, Lizzie! “The voice, in pain and sickness, of fancied faults afraid.” I scarcely know whether to ask you to write her a few lines or not. You have so much the better judgment, and will do whatever you think best as well as kindest. Dr. Dalling has just been. He says there is no change “at present,” and that the patient may take “whatever she seems to have a fancy for.” One knows but too well what that phrase means; instead of “having little meaning, though the words are strong,” the words are weak, but their sense is terrible. It is said that sickness makes the patient selfish: no one who sees mamma would believe that; but I feel that it has made the watcher selfish. Not a word have I written yet of the bright prospects which Aunt Louise tells us are dawning on your dear self. Believe me, however, that I congratulate you on them from the bottom of my heart; what little ray of gladness comes to me in this dark time is reflected from them. God bless you, dearest.

—Ever your affectionate friend, ‘MARY MELBURN.

‘P.S.—When you write, tell me how you left all at

Casterton. Aunt Louisa says nothing of herself. I am sure they must have felt your leaving them.'

'All at Casterton' was a periphrasis for Mat, of whom, perhaps, under present circumstances, the poor girl felt it almost a sin to be thinking. She was evidently in that unnatural condition (very different from a merely artificial one) which the apprehension of a great calamity often induces. In such cases, strange to say, what are called easy circumstances are an aggravation. If Mary, when forbidden, as she was by Dr. Dalling, to watch by her mother's bedside beyond a certain time, had been compelled to occupy herself with any employment, it would have been the better for her. Her mind had only itself to feed upon.

With Elizabeth Dart the very contrary was the case; a circumstance which had often kept her spirits from failing, and of late had enabled her to recover from a moral shock, which, in another less favourably constituted, might have left fatal effects. She had not only 'resources of her own,' as is said of a woman who knits, or a man who planes, but took a wide and far-reaching interest in many matters.

Her very exclusion from the world enabled her to take at least an independent view of it. Though her disposition was essentially feminine, she busied herself (for it was not a mere amusement with her) with reflections upon affairs that are with most of her sex out of the region of speculation. The contrast between the governess of the present day and her prototype, whose text-book was 'Mangnall's Questions,' was scarcely greater than that between Elizabeth Dart and her contemporaries of her own calling. She had no love of learning for its own sake, but used it as a stepping-stone for thought, and her thoughts were essentially of the present. In calling her 'practical' Mrs. Meyrick had unconsciously struck the key-note of an instrument the nature and compass of which were far beyond her comprehension. Adaptability is one of the chief attributes of the practical nature, and Elizabeth Dart possessed it in perfection: she could 'get on' with almost anybody, but when she had love and esteem for them, she was sympathy itself. Aunt Jane was never puzzled by her niece's conversation, or entertained any suspicion that her ideas moved on a higher plane than her own. Lizzie interested herself in matters of the house, and that question of ways and means which forms so important an item in the

lives of most of us, as though there were no greater topics of interest under the sun. In Mary's letter was enclosed a cheque for the salary to the date of her departure, 'with Mr. Melburn's compliments and thanks,' which, with the remainder of Mr. Argand's honorarium, placed the little household in quite a flourishing condition of finance. In vain had Mrs. Richter protested against Lizzie considering herself otherwise than as a guest. 'We are a joint-stock company, Aunt Jane,' was the firm rejoinder; 'and every speculation must be undertaken in concert.' It may not have been a very stable firm, or capable of standing any considerable commercial crisis, but the partners got on much more smoothly together than is usual in the City.

On the second afternoon of Lizzie's arrival, there occurred what was little less than a portent in that humble establishment: a visitor called. Susan appeared bearing a card, with a mourning edge promptly executed by her own fingers, and the curt introduction, 'Please, mum, Miss Argand, to see Miss Dart.' Lizzie was in her own room, so that on Mrs. Richter fell the first brunt of the interview. It was years since any one had thought it worth their while to place her in the position of hostess, and, for the moment, she was a little perturbed.

'I ought, perhaps, to have asked permission to present myself,' said the visitor, gently, perceiving the other's confusion; 'but my brother was so adverse to delay.'

'Mr. Argand has been very kind to my niece, she tells me,' said Mrs. Richter.

'From what he tells me, the obligation, if one exists at all, is quite on the other side,' said Miss Argand, graciously. 'What makes me a little ashamed of my intrusion here is the consciousness that self-interest, or, at all events, my brother's interest, is at the bottom of it. The "Millennium" is, as you are, doubtless, aware, of his own creation; and the writer of any article which has drawn so much public attention to it, as has happened in the case of Miss Dart's paper, must necessarily evoke, not only his professional sympathy, but his gratitude. Less than this,' she added, in less formal tones, 'I dare not say, lest I should fall under my brother's displeasure. We think ourselves most fortunate in being your neighbours, for it is only a stone's throw to Harewood Square; and I hope we shall have many opportunities of becoming better acquainted.'

'You are very good,' murmured Mrs. Richter. The

other's flow of words was rather too much for the little lady, and, as it were, carried her off her feet. 'I am sure we shall be very glad to call.'

'And not only to call, I hope. We look forward to seeing a great deal of you and your accomplished niece. She must be really a most marvellous personage.'

'I don't know as to that,' returned the widow, smiling; 'but, then, I am no judge. I can only say she is the dearest and best of girls——'

'Girls?' interrupted Miss Argand, quickly. 'I understood from my brother that she had been engaged in tuition for many years. You don't mean to say that Miss Dart is a girl?'

'You can judge for yourself,' answered the widow, smiling; for the amazement evinced by her visitor as Lizzie entered the room was most amusing to witness. Miss Argand was a lady of about forty years of age, tall and rather angular, but with a face full of expression. It had hitherto worn a most gracious air, tinged, however, by a little touch of patronage; but it now looked not only surprised but troubled.

'Miss Dart, I believe; though I can scarcely credit it,' she exclaimed, as she held out her hand. 'Is it possible that you are so young?'

'I do not feel "so young," or, at all events, not criminally young,' said Lizzie, smiling.

'It is a drawback which disappears in time,' said Mrs. Richter, cheerfully. The compliment to her niece which the visitor's words obviously implied was pleasing to her; while the tone of disappointment, and almost of rebuke, in which it was conveyed, escaped her notice.

'What amazes me is that, at your years, you could have written as you have done,' explained Miss Argand. 'I do not refer to your talents—for talents may belong to any one—but the manner in which you have treated the subject. Where on earth did you get all your queer information about the training of racehorses, for example?'

'I used to see them training on the downs,' said Lizzie, quietly, 'and then I made inquiries.'

'And about the Danes?—there were no Danes to tell you anything.'

'I have a friend who has made the subject his own, and who was so good as to place his knowledge at my service.'

'Some old antiquary, I suppose.'

This question was put with an air of interest which the matter hardly seemed to justify.

‘He is not very old—not old enough to be Urfa’s contemporary,’ said Lizzie, still smiling, but feeling just a little aggrieved upon Mr. Leyden’s account.

‘Well, it is a most marvellous paper,’ said Miss Argand, ‘and does you great credit. Every one is talking about it.’

‘I was very glad to find it pleased Mr. Argand,’ said Lizzie, modestly.

‘No doubt. It must be always a satisfaction to a contributor to find that the editor appreciates him—that is, of course, his work. Do you propose remaining long in town?’

‘Why, yes. If all goes well, I hope to remain here permanently.’

‘Indeed? It seems almost a pity, with your evident love of the country, and your talent—I may say, genius—for describing it, that you should bury yourself in London.’

‘But there is something to describe even in London.’

‘Yes, yes; but all that has been done. I’m afraid you’ll miss the fresh air and the scenery.’

The speaker bit her lips, and shook her head, and glanced through the window upon the Marylebone Road so disparagingly that Mrs. Richter felt herself called upon to say something in its defence.

‘We have not a very cheerful look-out here, it is true; but the air is wholesome enough.’

‘As wholesome, you would say, as in Harewood Square, at all events,’ remarked Miss Argand, frankly. ‘That’s quite true; but then, you and I, Mrs. Richter, are not so young as your niece. Now, don’t you agree with me that young people are always best away from the smoke and roar and whirl of London?’

‘We are not much in its whirl,’ observed the widow, gently. ‘We live, of necessity, a very quiet life. Moreover, we are not in a position to choose for ourselves.’

‘What we should like,’ said Lizzie, with some piquancy of tone, for the visitor’s remark had displeased her, ‘would be a house in the country, a house in town, and a house at the seaside.’

‘Oh! I don’t mean that,’ exclaimed Miss Argand, flushing to her forehead. ‘I am sure I should like all sorts of things which are altogether out of my reach. Only it is as easy to live, in a quiet way, of course, in any place as in London. I

am sure, if it were not for Felix and the "Millennium," nothing would induce me to live in town.' Then she went on in a half-frightened tone, like one who has exceeded, or perhaps disobeyed, her instructions from a higher power, 'I do hope, Miss Dart, that you and your aunt will let us see something of you. It is my brother's particular wish to make your acquaintance. People get on so much better in business matters—if, indeed, one may call literature business—when they know one another personally. My at-home day is Wednesday, but any day on which you will be good enough to call, I shall be charmed to see you.'

Then, with a shake of Mrs. Richter's hand, so cordial that it seemed to have something of compensation in it, and a somewhat less demonstrative squeeze of that of her niece, Miss Argand took her departure.

There was silence between the two ladies for some moments after she left the room; they stood looking at one another as if each waited for the other to express her opinion on the visitor before hazarding her own.

'She is certainly very strange,' observed Mrs. Richter, presently, 'but I think she means to be kind.'

'I am not quite sure of that,' said Lizzie, gravely.

'Her manner was much more genial when she first arrived,' remarked the widow, 'but somehow it seemed to grow colder. I am afraid I did not make a favourable impression upon her.'

'Nay; that fault must lie at my door, Aunt Jane,' returned her niece, with a forced smile. 'It was plain that my appearance fell very far short of her expectations.'

'That is impossible,' observed the widow, naïvely; 'but I do think she resented your being so young. Having made a picture in her mind of some learned lady of middle age, she must have been annoyed at having to root it all out to make room for *you*.'

'In that case I have the same cause for chagrin,' sighed Miss Dart. 'It was very foolish, no doubt, but, having formed so high an idea of Mr. Argand, I somehow imagined that everybody who belonged to him must be on the same plane. I confess I am disappointed.'

'I thought Mr. Argand was a married man,' observed Aunt Jane.

'So did I,' said Lizzie, smiling. 'Though I don't see how his being a bachelor should have made his sister so peculiar.'

'No; of course not,' returned the widow, hastily; 'only, being accustomed to keep house for him, and so on, puts her in a certain position.'

'Yet it did not strike me that she made any attempt to patronise us.'

'Certainly not, my dear: I thought she seemed to behave with delicacy in that way. To some women's minds the difference between Harewood Square and a second floor in the Marylebone Road would have been present throughout the interview.'

'She is not a vulgar woman,' remarked Lizzie confidently, 'but that only makes her behaviour the more unintelligible.'

'I am not prepared to say that I dislike her,' said Aunt Jane, with an air of concession.

'No; nor I, exactly. I am quite prepared to say, however, that I don't like her manner. Upon the whole, I am sorry she came. It would have been better if I had followed my instincts and called upon Mr. Argand at his office.'

'Oh, Lizzie, that would never have done, since it turns out that he is not married.'

'My dear Aunt Jane, what does it signify to his contributors whether the editor of the "Millennium" is married or not? I could never get you to understand that literature—that is, the business part of it—is just as much a business as dealing in corn.'

'Very good, my dear; I only hope that it is in a less depressed condition than the newspapers describe corn to be.'

Her words, as Lizzie quite understood, were not meant to be discouraging, except so far as the present topic was concerned, but what particular 'fad' dear Aunt Jane had got in her mind she could not guess.

'Well, I suppose we must return Miss Argand's call, at all events,' observed Lizzie; 'and since the invitation was given in so formal and almost reluctant a way, it had better be on her at-home day.'

'I am ashamed to confess, my dear,' said Mrs. Richter, with a little flush, 'that I don't quite know what an at-home day.'

'It is a day set apart for the reception of those outside acquaintances whom we must receive,' explained Lizzie laughing, 'so that for the remainder of the week, at least, we may feel ourselves free of them.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN HAREWOOD SQUARE.

ON the ensuing Wednesday Mrs. Richter and Miss Dart presented themselves in Harewood Square. Mr. Argand's house was one of the smallest it contained, and they found the little drawing-room crowded with callers. Lizzie had rather feared, from what Miss Argand had said to her, that she would find herself the object of some attention; but the buzz of conversation was only just as much interrupted by their entrance as happens when strangers make their appearance in a circle the members of which are tolerably well known to one another. It was resumed again, as water meets behind the hand that parts it, as soon as they sat down. The company was composed almost entirely of ladies; the few males who were scattered among them had rather the air of chaperons—elderly persons who, having nothing particular to do, had accompanied their belongings to a scene in which they took little personal interest. There were, however, one or two young men, of more or less intellectual physiognomy, whom Lizzie shrewdly concluded to be paying their respects to the lady of the house with a view to indirectly commending themselves to her brother's notice. It was the ladies who almost exclusively kept up the ball of conversation, and, as a rule, with much more than the average success. Their talk was by no means confined to the 'movements' of the aristocracy, balls, or bonnets, but dealt with art and literature, as well as the more engrossing topics of the day. Their attire was, in many cases, æsthetic; it was a marvel to Mrs. Richter how some of their gowns held together, for they appeared to be draped in them rather than dressed. The conversation was not only lively but continuous; it required no lifting from the hostess, who, indeed, seldom joined in it unless she was appealed to. She had motioned the two late comers to the sofa where she sat, as though she desired to have them near her, but she only addressed to them a few commonplaces. It seemed to Lizzie that, though perfectly at ease with her numerous guests, she seemed preoccupied and a little nervous. Presently, a little knot in her immediate neighbourhood

started a topic which appeared to have a keener interest for them than those they had hitherto discussed.

'It is no use our appealing to Miss Argand,' said one of them, looking at the hostess with significance, 'or I am sure she would corroborate my view.'

'At all events, she would not corroborate Mr. Herbert's view,' observed another.

'I think not, indeed,' said a third, contemptuously, and then they all laughed.

'I don't know what the knotty point is,' observed Miss Argand, 'which you pay me the compliment of supposing I can unravel.'

'Oh, we know you can unravel it,' rejoined the first speaker, 'only you are so obstinate and unkind. We are talking about the famous article: concerning its merits we are all agreed, but about its authorship we are as much at sea as ever.'

Miss Argand turned very red, and shook her head.

'Now, you mustn't be angry with us,' said the second speaker, 'and we don't want you to betray your brother's confidence; but do tell us whether it is quite a new hand that wrote it, or an old one that pretends to be new? If the latter, we shall be much relieved, for, though success in any form is to be deprecated, we shall not mind it so much where we are used to it: what we all abominate is rising talent.'

'Pray speak for yourself, Mrs. Broom,' cried the other ladies, in chorus.

'Not at all,' rejoined that lady, who was a novelist of some reputation; 'let us be quite honest, and set the example of frankness. Now, don't tell us that it is a new hand.'

'I shall certainly not tell you that, nor anything else about it,' said the hostess; 'it is a subject my brother does not wish discussed.'

'Wish discussed!' echoed speaker number three. 'Well, upon my word, that is going a little too far. The idea of an editor getting a new genius, or an old one pretending to be a new one, to write him a first-rate contribution, and then not wishing it discussed! Why, of course, that is the very thing he does wish. If it was only moderately good, I can imagine that mystery might be some advantage, but when nothing is to be gained by it, why not satisfy our curiosity? Just consider what an advertisement we should make for your brother; all our tongues going nineteen to the dozen, in the best lite-

rary circles, in praise of Mr. Argand's novice, as they say in the sporting journals ; or (if it must be so) in praise of some famous author who, we had fondly hoped, had written himself out.'

'I must positively decline to reveal the writer's name,' said Miss Argand, snatching up a newspaper and using it both as a fan and a screen.

'We are getting warm, as the children say,' murmured the lady novelist. 'I don't think she will be able to hold out much longer.'

'We don't want his name,' persisted number three, 'or, rather, we are hopeless of getting that out of you. We want to know whether he is a new man.'

'And whether he is a young man,' observed number one; 'that particularly, for it will make him all the more interesting to us.'

'Or whether he is a man at all,' put in number two. 'Mr. Herbert pretends to have discovered, from internal evidence, that this paragon is a woman.'

'Mr. Herbert is a great critic,' observed Miss Argand, with well-affected gravity.

'Oh, come, we are not going to stand that!' put in Mrs. Broom, indignantly; 'a more pretentious and untrustworthy guide has never essayed to lead astray the public taste.'

There was an uncomfortable silence for a moment, for every one knew that Mr. Herbert had fallen foul of Mrs. Broom's last novel in the 'Literary Review.'

'Still, he has some discernment,' remarked number one; 'though not, indeed, as a reviewer'—a murmur of adhesion seemed to pervade the entire room; 'and I should like to know what has caused him to adopt such an extraordinary opinion.'

'Well, I have heard,' said number three, 'that he finds certain tender touches in it.'

'In the description of the jockey's spurs?' put in Mrs. Broom, with acidity.

'No, no; in the account of the Danish wives who are waiting in vain at home for the return of their husbands—all slain on Battle Hill; and these, he says, could only have been written by a woman.'

'On the contrary, they could only have been written by a man,' contended Mrs. Broom. 'Of course, a man would make out that the widows were in a dreadful state.'

Mrs. Richter gave a little groan : the lady novelist was too much for her ; yet, strange to say—such little attention does the ordinary reader pay to what he reads—she had not the least idea that it was her niece's contribution that was under discussion.

'Moreover,' continued number three, 'Mr. Herbert says, in his article in the "Looker On" this week, that, though the coursing on the downs is so admirably described, it is a feminine view of sport ; there is more pity for the hare expressed than "brutal man" would exhibit.'

'In sentiment, at all events,' observed one of the young men, whose attention, like that of the rest of the company, had been gradually absorbed by the subject under discussion, 'it strikes me that the new writer, whoever he is, is an imitator of Dickens.'

'No, sir,' observed Mrs. Broom, authoritatively, 'the man who wrote "A Bit of Old England" has a style of his own, and is an imitator of nobody.'

'Good heavens! they are talking about *you*, Lizzie,' murmured Mrs. Richter, in a terrified whisper.

Miss Dart, who had, of course, been aware of the fact from the first, nodded her head as though in reply to some indifferent remark ; the conversation immensely amused her.

'I suppose,' observed a lady, 'there is no chance of our seeing Mr. Argand here to-day?'

'I am afraid not,' replied the hostess.

'Well, you tell him,' said Mrs. Broom, rising, 'that I should dearly like to have the cross-examining of him for five minutes about his contributor. Heaven bless you, my dear!' Here she kissed her hostess with much demonstrativeness of affection, and left the room.

'I suppose you will tell us one thing, Miss Argand,' observed the young man who had already spoken, as the door closed behind the lady novelist. 'It was not Mrs. Broom herself who wrote the article, was it?'

'It certainly was not,' answered the hostess. 'What should make you think of such a thing, Mr. Wybrow?'

'Oh, only that she praised it so,' was the naïve rejoinder. At this there was a general laugh, a clatter of empty tea-cups as the guests placed them on the table, and the rustle which attends the breaking up of a female conclave. Mrs. Richter and her niece also rose from their seats, but, at a whispered

word from their hostess, 'Be so good as to stay a moment,' they resumed them.

Then Lizzie understood at once that the master of the house, though by no means 'at home' in the conventional sense, was in fact within doors, and would presently see her. Hardly had the front-door closed, indeed, on the last of the visitors when Mr. Argand entered the drawing-room. He was a tall, spare man of thirty-five, but looking considerably older; his brown hair, mixed with grey, was already beginning to be scant; his shoulders had that stoop in them, produced as much from a habit of keeping their eyes on the ground as from the sedentary nature of their pursuits, which almost always belongs to men of thought. His eyes were large, though somewhat sunk, and full of expression. He came in very quickly, holding out his hand with an eager smile. 'How good it is of you to have come to us, Mrs. Richter,' he said; then, as Lizzie's hand met his, he retained it, patting it as if she were a child, and regarding her with the utmost interest and approval. 'So this is really you, is it, Miss Dart? It seems incredible, doesn't it, Joanna?'

'Miss Dart looks very young, as I told you,' said Miss Argand, drily, her indifferent manner contrasting very strongly with the excitement and surprise exhibited by her brother.

'Well, and what did you think of our dilettanti; I beg their pardon, I mean our literati? You have nothing to compare with them at Casterton, we flatter ourselves;' here he smiled, and so significantly that it was plain his words of boastfulness had the sense of deprecation.

'I thought some of them very interesting,' said Lizzie, 'especially Mrs. Broom.'

Miss Argand glanced at her brother, as much as to say, 'You hear that? Where is the discernment of character of which you talk so much?'

'In what way interesting?' inquired Mr. Argand. 'I am curious to learn how she struck you.'

'I thought her very clever and also honest, but with a better opinion of her talents than that entertained by others. Is she "anybody very particular," as Mr. Hook used to say?'

'She is anything but particular,' observed Miss Argand. 'I never knew a woman say such things.'

'She is certainly remarkable. Yes, a woman of character. An authoress, too, of considerable note,' said Mr. Argand, in the tone of a man who weighs his words, but with a certain

distract air, as though they were the words of somebody else.

'You know you will never take one of her novels for the "Millennium," Felix, though she has importuned you enough to have persuaded the unjust judge.'

'Quite true, my dear; she has only failed because I am too good a judge. Everybody says that sooner or later, Miss Dart, I must call in the aid of fiction, but then it need not be Mrs. Broom's fiction. On the other hand, she is undoubtedly a clever woman, and, as you say, "honest," after a fashion. She speaks her mind.'

'What I meant by honest was that she did not seem to be afraid to acknowledge her own weaknesses, or even the merits of others. Perhaps, however, I ought to confess that she was so good as to take up the cudgels for my poor little contribution.'

Mr. Argand shot a glance at once astonished and displeased at his sister.

'Oh! you needn't be alarmed,' she replied, complainingly. 'I have disclosed no secrets; but, unfortunately, Miss Dart's paper became the subject of discussion in her presence. Even a vivisectionist would have felt for her. However, they never found out that they were cutting her up.'

'Isaac Walton could not have treated his worm more tenderly, I do assure you,' said Miss Dart, laughing; 'they really were most appreciatory.'

'Literary folk mostly are; it is only the fools and the failures who are grudging,' observed Mr. Argand. 'Who were there here to-day, Joanna?'

'Miss Rian.'

'Poetess,' explained Mr. Argand, like a quick chorus; 'has written some charming lyrics, and at least one tedious epic; bears the reputation of being a great classical scholar with everybody—that is, with everybody who doesn't know the classics.'

'For shame, Felix!' remonstrated his sister.

'Never mind me, my dear; I am only saving Miss Dart's time. She would find all these people out for herself, and paint them to the life for us in half-a-dozen sittings. Well?'

'Then there was Miss Dixie.'

'Female representative of the higher culture. She'll talk to you by the yard about the mission of art. She has the courage of her opinions, and dresses in the Grecian style.'

‘I noticed her,’ murmured Mrs. Richter.

‘Well, then, perhaps you can tell us how she does it,’ observed Miss Argand, with an interest that seemed to be aroused in spite of herself. ‘She assures us that she never uses hooks or eyes, or laces, or pins, or buttons for her garments. Do you think they are held together by the edges of postage stamps?’

‘That is much too prosaic,’ said Mr. Argand; ‘let us suggest, with diffidence, “everlasting bands.”’

‘They are sold at fourpence a box at Whiteley’s,’ observed Mrs. Richter, confidently—a piece of information which was received with suppressed rapture.

The widow’s natural and pleasant ways recommended themselves to her host and hostess. Her prejudice, if it could be called by so harsh a name, had already given way to liking for the latter; while the former, to meeting with whom she had looked forward with terror, she pronounced, to herself, quite delightful. With Mr. Argand, Lizzie was, as she had expected to be, at her ease, except, indeed, that she felt she owed him certain acknowledgments she could not speak of at present; and which, while they remained unexpressed, left her, as it were, an ungracious debtor; but between Miss Argand and herself she felt there was an invisible barrier, composed of she knew not what. It was certainly not anything of her own creation. She was naturally desirous of being good friends with one so nearly connected with the kindly editor, nor did she herself dislike her hostess, but she was conscious of that instinct of repulsion, wanting only to the most egotistic, and which never errs, which warned her that the impression she had made upon Miss Argand was unfavourable. It was curious; for not only had she from the first, of course, endeavoured to make herself agreeable to her, but it was plain that Miss Argand had called upon her aunt with the best intentions, and presumably with the desire to be pleased. It could not be ascribed to jealousy; for, even if Lizzie had been inclined to plume herself upon her brief and solitary literary performance, which she was far from doing—indeed, the high terms in which she had heard it spoken of astonished and amazed her—Miss Argand was not herself a woman of letters. Her manner again, though distinctly unconciliatory, was as difficult to define as her reasons for dislike were to discern. It had nothing of the offence of patronage about it; nor of that insolent neglect which women of fashion do not

scruple to use in their own houses to guests of their own sex whom it is not worth their while to cultivate ; it was not even exactly cold. But what graciousness there was in it seemed to be admitted against the grain. Her face, however, had never expressed such decided displeasure as it did when Mr. Argand presently said :—

‘ Now, Joanna, you must do your very best to make yourself agreeable to Mrs. Richter, for I am going to talk to this young lady about business matters.’

‘ Then you had better go into the back drawing-room,’ was the grave rejoinder—a reply evidently rehearsed beforehand, and which seemed to be dragged out of the speaker by the roots.

To this proposition there was, of course, no alternative but to consent ; and Miss Dart rose at once and passed with her host into the next room, which, though undivided from the larger apartment by either door or curtain, admitted of private converse.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

EDITOR AND CONTRIBUTOR.

MR. FELIX ARGAND was one of those men who, with all the will in the world to be precise and neat, are inherently the reverse in practice. He boasted that he knew where to lay his hand on every manuscript in his office, and not without reason, but, to the looker-on, it seemed incredible that to such a labyrinth of confusion there could be a key of any kind ; he was accurate and punctual in all things, but he arrived at these virtues by a way of his own which would have driven any one else who pursued it distracted ; the simplest operations of arithmetic he performed in a manner that Colenso never dreamt of, but nevertheless successfully. With the work of his hands he was equally peculiar, but the result was not so felicitous ; he was, in fact, dreadfully clumsy. To wheel an easy-chair into a quiet corner for his companion’s accommodation, and to place a footstool beneath it, was by no means with him what ‘ to snatch a battle-axe from the nearest foe on the one hand, and to strike man and horse to the earth on the other,’ is to the hero of romance—*i.e.* the work of an instant. It took a considerable time ; but he went about it with the enthusiasm of a ‘navvy at a barrow.’ Miss Dart could not

help smiling at his laborious arrangements for her comfort, but she nevertheless appreciated them; they were evidently exceptional marks of favour with him. When they were completed to his mind, he sat down close beside her, and, in a tone in which sincere respect was strangely blended with curiosity, he said, 'Now do, pray, tell me all about yourself, Miss Dart.'

'But I have told you, or at least written to you, Mr. Argand, all that could possibly interest you about so small a subject.'

'Pardon me, but you did not tell me; you rather misled me—though, I do not doubt, without meaning it. I had pictured to myself somebody wholly different.'

'In what way?'

'It is hardly fair to put that question,' he answered, smiling; 'perhaps I expected too much—in the way of age. You're absurdly young, you see, to be a contributor to the "Millennium."'

'I am very sorry; perhaps in ten years' time or so, I may be competent for it. Is there no method of accelerating ripeness? Would you recommend me to go round the Cape?'

He laughed long and softly, eking out his mirth like one who enjoys something rich and rare, rocking himself to and fro, and nursing his knee, but at the same time looking at her steadfastly.

'I recommend you to do nothing,' he said, earnestly, 'but to follow in all things your own suggestions. There are minds which, in literary matters, require a hint or two to start them, as some pumps require a few drops of water to set them a-going; and there are others to whom every recommendation from without is an obstruction and an embarrassment: you belong, I fear, to the latter class.'

'Why did you say, "I fear"?' inquired Lizzie. 'If it is as you say, I shall give you less trouble.'

'I did not know that I had said "I fear,"' he answered, simply; 'it was an unconscious outburst of selfishness; I had flattered myself, before I had the pleasure of seeing you, that I might have been of some assistance to you in the path you have chosen.'

'You have been of more assistance to me already than gratitude can express,' she answered, eagerly; 'that is what I have wanted to say to you ever so long; for though it is only a few days since I received your kind letter, it seems a lifetime: your words of encouragement have indeed given me new life.'

He listened to her like one who partakes of some pleasure of which his judgment, if not his conscience, disapproves, but who cannot resist prolonging it. 'It is only fair and right,' he said, 'to tell you that you are mistaken. You are like a passenger at some great railway junction who has happened, through information supplied by a passer-by, to have just hit his train; if he had not done so he would have caught the next, and if not that the next. I have been so fortunate as to offer the first opportunity of making you known to the world—that is all: genius, like murder, will always out.'

Miss Dart shook her head and smiled. 'I am going to put a very impertinent question, Mr. Argand. Are you quite sure if this insignificant contribution of mine, of which I must say it seems far too much has been made, had not appeared in the "Millennium"—if, in short, you had had nothing to do with me—do you honestly believe you would have thought so highly of it?'

'As regards the "Millennium," I boldly say yes. I should have been transported with envy had I seen it anywhere else; but as to your second question—well, if I had not seen you, of course I should have thought less of your talents. What is merely excellent in the writing of a man of fifty is a miracle in one of fifteen.'

'And would you have thought I was fifty?' inquired Miss Dart, smiling.

'No; because your pen has too light a touch; but I should certainly have thought you nearer fifty than fifteen. In that very misleading account of yourself, you say that you have been engaged in tuition for the last eight years. How could that possibly have been?'

'I might have been a nursery governess, and taught spelling, surely, while I washed the baby and dressed the children, and wheeled the double perambulator.'

'Stuff and nonsense! You?'

'It is true, however, that at sixteen I was pupil-teacher in a ladies' college.'

'Dear, dear! And was that necessary?' inquired Mr. Argand, with compassionate earnestness.

'It was right and fitting, at all events; as to necessity, my dear Aunt Jane, yonder, would no doubt have kept me in idleness out of her scanty income to this day, had I allowed her.'

Mr. Argand's eyes flashed towards Mrs. Richter a look

that seemed to say, 'Excellent woman!' and then flashed back again to his companion. It seemed as though he could read her genius in her features, so great was their attraction for him.

'Well, and then?'

'I stayed at the college nearly eight years, and then went out as a governess to—well—near Casterton, as you know: that was my first situation.'

'And you have had no experience of life?'

'Nothing to speak of.'

'It is wonderful; it is incredible,' he murmured. 'But where did you get all your knowledge of social matters? It is only hinted at, of course, in what you have written, but it has not escaped me.'

'I have read whenever I had leisure for reading.'

'What have you read?'

'Everything that came in my way.'

'Not excluding the newspapers, it seems?'

'Certainly not; that was the only means I had of knowing what was going on in the world. I have always thought for myself; now I want to see for myself.'

'What is it you want to see?'

'Everything. Not the Tower and the Thames Tunnel, but the world; not society only—which is a very small portion of it—but human life. That is the sole thing that now interests me.'

'Why do you say *now*?'

The colour flew to Miss Dart's cheek. 'Because I have given up teaching, and wish to be a student myself.' Up to this point Mr. Argand had been well convinced that his companion had been telling him the whole truth; it was now equally plain to him that she had something to conceal. He would have given much to hear what it was; but he would not for worlds have called up that blush again, for there had been distress and pain in it.

'I wish the "Millennium" was a newspaper,' he said, smiling; 'you would make an admirable special correspondent.'

'Would not a home correspondent be of some use to you? A writer who would treat of social matters—not, indeed, from a new point of view, but from an old one which has been forgotten?'

'I don't quite understand you.'

'It is difficult to explain myself, yet I know what I mean.'

Every social question seems now covered by layers of dust—the result of party feeling and conventionality; there are new ways of looking at them—mostly utopian or immoral—but they cannot even be *seen*. Would it not be possible to let the light of Nature in upon them? You will say this requires originality of mind. Not at all. It only requires simplicity—nay, even a sort of ignorance. There have been humorous attempts at looking at civilisation from without, through the eyes of barbarians, but I am a serious barbarian.'

'Very true,' said Mr. Argand; he was not thinking of her definition of herself, but of her proposition. 'If any one else had made such a suggestion to me, I should have laughed at it, but you have exceptional advantages for such a task.'

'You mean disadvantages?'

'To a certain extent, yes,' he answered, thoughtfully. 'Has your mind dwelt long upon this scheme of setting the world to rights?'

'Yes; but very vaguely. It is only of late that it has obtruded itself.'

'Some shock, no doubt, has brought it to the surface. Just as the fall of a large stone into a lake will bring up objects at the very bottom to the face of the water.'

'Perhaps.' Her eyes were riveted on the carpet, her lips were drawn together, her cheeks were once more crimson.

'Well, you can try your hand.'

'Thank you.' Her tone had gratitude in it, but also a sober satisfaction and relief. It was not so much that of a person who has made an appeal which has been granted, as of one who has made a suggestion likely to be of common advantage which has been acceded to.

'There is only one thing more,' said Mr. Argand; 'you must understand that this is to be a business affair; that you and I are talking as editor and contributor, and in no other relation with one another.'

'Of course,' she answered, simply. 'How else could I have ventured to ask what would have seemed a mere favour?'

Mr. Argand bit his lip. 'I hope, Miss Dart, even if it had been so, you would not have hesitated to ask me a favour?'

'Certainly not. I am under much too great an obligation to you already to feel the weight of a little more kindness or indulgence, but this is a professional matter, wherein to ask a favour would not have been fair.'

'That is not, by any means, the view of the ordinary

contributor, I do assure you,' said Mr. Argand, with a sigh—the echo of many a reminiscence. 'However, what I was about to say is that, since we have come to an understanding about this affair, the usual arrangements must be entered into. The proposition you have made me may, and indeed must, entail certain expenses. You will, therefore, not be offended when I say that you must allow me to advance you what is requisite——'

'Offended!' she put in quickly. 'Why should I be offended? I have been accustomed to take five pounds five shillings—the last not always in silver—every quarter for my professional services. That is one of the things that strike me as so strange in the world: why people who have, perhaps, very little delicacy about anything else, should be so sensitive about money matters. The workman is worthy of his hire, only, I object to his being paid before his work is done.'

'But in this case, as I say, there may be initial expenses: money out of pocket.'

'Then I will come to you with my account. I am afraid, Mr. Argand, you must think me dreadfully practical,' she added, softly.

'I think you—quite right,' said Mr. Argand. The sentence, which had begun enthusiastically, seemed to end coldly, discreetly, and in a manner that he had not intended. 'It is a great mistake to mingle sentiment with business.'

'Yet, to judge by your letters,' she answered, gently, 'you allow sentiment—if, at least, kindness and pity come under that head—to influence your conduct even as regards practical matters.'

'You are thinking of your young friend at Casterton. Well, of course, I was touched by his peculiar circumstances; but not to the extent'—here he smiled, as he flattered himself, like a rogue, but, to Lizzie's eyes, it was a very pleasant smile—'of engaging his services for the "Millennium." I only recommended him to somebody else.'

'But even that was kind.'

'I don't know. It is as troublesome to refuse to grant a favour as to ask one of another.'

'Not to a selfish nature.'

'We men are all selfish. It is true, however, that we are not all brutal. Though sentiment does not affect our dealings, social matters have, no doubt, a great influence on them. It is said that more bargains are struck in the city at

luncheon time than during any other hour. Personal acquaintanceship, no doubt, oils the wheel of business-life better than the best professional introduction.'

'And is it not the same in literature?'

'That is a very delicate question. Indeed, with an editor, it is a sore subject. Personal acquaintanceship is his bane. If a man knows me enough to nod to, that is urged as a reason for my accepting a contribution—if not from himself, from some protégé. If I take a lady down to dinner, she writes to me next morning offering a MS. upon that ground. With those he knows more intimately it is even worse; for to refuse a friend admission into "our columns" is to lose him. An editor should have no friends to start with. I sometimes wish that all my communications with my fellow-creatures could be carried on through the post, so that I need never be brought face to face with them.'

'But this is very discouraging,' observed Miss Dart, with gravity.

'Do, pray, believe me,' he added, quickly, 'that I am not universally morose. There are contributors whom I have desired to know, and, having known, appreciate all the more. Indeed, it is one of the chief recommendations of a literary calling that it introduces one to the people who are best worth knowing.'

'I can well imagine that,' said Miss Dart, enthusiastically. 'How charming it must be to have one's ambition in that way gratified!'

'But it is not *my* ambition,' returned Mr. Argand, drily. 'I appreciate its advantages, of course, but the profession of letters is not my ideal of life. Perhaps I have no ideal; but what I take most interest in is politics. That seems to astonish you.'

'It amazes me! Do you wish, then, to be in Parliament?'

'Most certainly I do.'

'And on which side?—for from the "Millennium" I am not even able to gather that.'

'I hope not. I shall be on neither side. If ever I take my seat in the House—which is very improbable—it will be as a very independent member. However, that is a subject which can hardly interest you. We were talking of Mr. Matthew Meyrick. His poems are really very creditable to him—and to you for having discovered them. I hope the young gentleman is better.'

'I am afraid he will never get better. He has, I fear, an incurable disease—some ailment of the spine.'

'Still, that is not always incurable. He should come to town, and see Dredge about it.'

'Dr. Dredge? That is the gentleman Dr. Dalling spoke to me about, to the same effect, at Burrow Hall. How I wish I could persuade Matthew to see him!'

'I should have thought you could persuade him to do anything,' said Mr. Argand, simply. 'What is it, Joanna?'

His sister was standing behind his chair.

'I have already addressed you twice, Felix,' said that lady, with a complaining air, 'but you paid no attention to me. Mrs. Richter has matters to attend to at home, and wishes to know when your conference with Miss Dart is likely to be over.'

'It is not late,' said Mr. Argand, with a little irritation, produced by his sister's manner, rather than her words.

'It is indeed,' cried Miss Dart, consulting the watch her aunt had given her on the day she had come of age. It was only a silver one, but it had cost that lady a month's income.

Lizzie rose in haste, and, as she did so, the circling notes of a gong below stairs made themselves heard.

'Dear me!' exclaimed Mrs. Richter, from the next room, 'we are actually keeping Mr. and Miss Argand from their dinner, Lizzie.'

'It is only the dressing gong,' explained the hostess, graciously. Her brother hastily whispered something to her; to which she replied, 'Impossible; not to-day—there is not enough.'

The words were inaudible to her visitors, yet one of them, at least, guessed what had been said.

Lizzie held out her hand to Mr. Argand. 'I thank you once more for your great kindness.'

'Don't talk of that,' he said, but he took her hand, and returned its pressure warmly. Doubtless, he forgot the circumstance—as his sister often said, 'Dear Felix was so absent'—since, after escorting his visitors to the front door, he again took her hand; which, Mrs. Richter afterwards observed, though not absolutely improper, was unusual: like being helped twice to soup.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

‘THE PUBLIC GOOD.’

‘WELL, my dear,’ said Mrs. Richter, as she and her niece pursued their way homeward, ‘and what do you think of it all?’

‘I am very glad I have seen Mr. Argand, and much obliged to you for doing what, I fear, must have been little short of a penance for my sake.’

‘You mean the “at home”; well, that was certainly rather trying. The idea of hearing you discussed in that manner, some of them even suggesting that you were a man! But I had really almost forgotten the “at-home.” Do you know that you have been talking to Mr. Argand exactly one hour and a half?’

‘You should rather say he has been talking to me.’

‘I suppose so. He looked, however, very much interested in what you were saying.’

‘He is most kind and sympathetic; his ears are open to everything, even to what I told him about Mr. Matthew Meyrick.’

‘And as to your own affairs—I mean the “Millennium,” and so on,’ put in Aunt Jane, hastily, like one who is afraid of misinterpretation, or having gone too far.

‘He has taken all I proposed into his most favourable consideration. I have got what it does not fall to every one to get—my chance.’

‘I am so glad you are pleased, dear.’

The congratulation did not move Lizzie the less because it was clear that Aunt Jane did not comprehend the cause of her satisfaction. ‘I do not understand: I love’ is a motto not only applicable to wives.

‘And you? I am afraid you did not find the time pass so agreeably with Miss Argand. She struck me as a little cold.’

‘She was very communicative and confidential with me, nevertheless, my dear, I do assure you.’

‘Indeed.’

‘Yes; I thought rather unnecessarily so. She took great pains to impress upon me that Mr. Argand had nothing but

the profits of his magazine to live upon ; and that he was very ambitious.'

'That is quite true,' returned Lizzie, gently ; ' he gave me to understand as much himself ; that is the only thing that somehow disappointed me in him ; he wants to get into Parliament.'

'Oh, dear ; oh, dear,' sighed Mrs. Richter.

'There is nothing so disgraceful in it,' laughed Lizzie, 'that you should distress yourself about it ; but it seems to me a small aspiration for such a nature. However, every one to his taste. I dare say there would be many, if it was worth their while, to pick holes in mine. Aunt Jane, I am going to ask you a great favour.'

'My dear, I wish I had one to grant you.'

'But you have. I want you to go about with me wherever I can't go by myself.'

'Any more "at-homes" ?' inquired Aunt Jane, in the tone of one who is anxious to know the worst.

'No ; it is nothing of that kind.'

'Then I am prepared to go to gaol with you if it is necessary,' was the cheerful reply.

'Certainly, we must see the gaols ; also the courts of law that lead to them ; the hospitals, the docks, the slums——'

'The what ?' inquired Mrs. Richter, with amazement.

'The dwellings of the poorest of the poor. I want to see everything, and Mr. Argand has promised to put me in the way of doing it.'

'Very good, my dear ; I only hope,' added the widow, in a resigned whisper, 'we shall not be robbed and murdered.'

In after years, when one of these two ladies had become a celebrity, this incident was misrecorded in the usual wicked fashion. There were even humorous pictures of the audacious pair engaged in putting their design into execution, borrowed from the designs of the once famous 'Tom and Bob' seeing 'Life in London' ; a tribute to her niece's popularity which, one is glad to think, never met Mrs. Richter's eyes. The subject was one which not only lent itself to illustration, but, naturally enough, awakened ridicule. Miss Dart's scheme of research was no doubt crude ; still, those who would paint from life must draw from the living model, and the eye of genius can seize at a glance more than the more commonplace vision can grasp in a lifetime. Simple as was her plan, it would not have been easy of execution but for Mr. Argand's assistance.

He had an ‘open sesame’ for most doors, and placed it, as he had promised, at his fair contributor’s disposal. She sat beside the judge upon the bench, and visited the criminal in his cell; she plumbed the depths of misery into which the poor are plunged, and in ministering, so far as she was able, to their needs, partook of their rare enjoyments; she did not shrink even from beholding those sharp and terrible remedies with which the surgeon seems to mock humanity in granting to it a new lease of existence.

Nor was the brighter side of life neglected: not only did she visit the usual haunts of pleasure, but often enjoyed what had hitherto been utterly unknown to her—the intellectual feast. At Mr. Argand’s table she met what his sister was wont to describe as ‘everybody’—a term which is seldom quite so comprehensive as the user would have it understood, but which in this case was, at least, tolerably wide. She met poets, statesmen, critics, doctors, lawyers—all of whom had achieved for themselves more or less of reputation. Her good looks were a sufficient passport to their attention; but she talked but little to them. Upon the whole, perhaps, their conversation disappointed her. She missed the enthusiasm of Matthew Meyrick, and the earnestness of Roger Leyden. They seemed wanting in originality, or perhaps had lost, in the grinding of the social mill, ‘the picturesque of man and man.’

But she was entirely at her ease with them. Her paper in the ‘Millennium’ was as completely forgotten as though it had never been written; no one wonders to see a pretty girl at any table, whether there is anything in her or not. Miss Argand, though stiff in her manner, was always polite. Lizzie did not ‘get on’ with her, but there was nothing to find fault with in her as a hostess; she was what very few people were with whom she came into anything like close contact—an enigma to her. What also puzzled her, with respect to this lady, was the silence which Aunt Jane maintained about her. It was probable, Lizzie thought, that she disliked her, but, from her disinclination to make mischief, preferred to keep her thoughts to herself. Nor was Mr. Argand himself quite so intelligible to her as on first acquaintance she had thought him to be. His kindness to her was unremitting, and was exhibited to her in a thousand ways; but there was something of reserve in his manner for which she could not account. He had also moods of depression, which, she had her suspicion, were connected with business affairs; but, on

the other hand, he always spoke of the 'Millennium' as a financial success. 'It has got a firm hold of the public mind,' he once said of it; 'and with such a sheet-anchor one ought to ride out any ordinary gale.'

She wondered what sort of a gale it was of whose rising he stood in fear; but the tone in which he had spoken of it did not encourage inquiry. To see Mr. Argand sad gave her great discomfort; but this did not often happen. She had plenty to do, and plenty to think about, and no apprehension for the future. She enjoyed, in short, that *summum bonum* of the diligent soul—work without worry. The time passed only too quickly. She discovered, for the first time, that life was full of happiness.

It was her practice to get up early, and work with her pen for an hour or two before breakfast; what she was doing, Aunt Jane never inquired into, but only devoutly hoped that it was not a new treatise on the works of Apollinaris. It was marvellous how Lizzie had managed to describe Casterton in so entertaining a manner; and perhaps she would be able to invest the Marylebone Road with a similar interest. Literature had a very limited horizon for Mrs. Richter, but she knew that her niece stood on a far higher standpoint, and must needs see much farther. She had an immense admiration for her talents, without much confidence in the material results which were likely to flow from them; and this made her very reticent about her niece's literary work.

Lizzie's astonishment may be imagined, therefore, when one morning her aunt, who had been making the tea as usual, while she herself was busy at her desk, suddenly inquired, in a tone of mingled interest and deprecation, 'My dear child, who on earth is John Javelin?'

For the moment Lizzie thought that the remark was a personal one; indeed, it was as much through chance as through Mrs. Richter's native simplicity that up to that moment the widow had never associated her with that name. Miss Argand had taken it for granted that she knew her niece wrote under that pseudonym; but Lizzie, as we know, had purposely concealed the fact from her.

'John Javelin? He is a writer in the "Millennium,"' replied Miss Dart, quietly. 'What about him?'

'Well, there is a good deal about him: two columns in this newspaper about him. I hope it will not do the "Mil-

lennium " any harm ; but Mr. Argand seems to have got hold of a very queer contributor.'

'I have not seen the " Millennium " yet ; it only comes out to-day ; but I suppose it is sent to the newspapers in advance.'

'Well, the " Times " has got it, at all events, and Mr. Javelin has " got it " too, in another sense. Oh, my dear Lizzie, how glad I am it is not you ; not, of course, that you would ever dream of writing such an article, speaking evil of dignities, or, at all events, speaking of them in an irreverent way, and so audacious from beginning to end !'

'Dear me,' observed Lizzie, with an irrepressible twinkle in her eyes ; 'how shocking !'

'Well, of course you feel bound to stick up for the " Millennium " ; but you don't know. When you have read the review——'

'Read it out to me,' put in Lizzie, smiling ; 'the tea is only just made ; and you have excited my interest immensely.'

'I wonder what poor Mr. Argand will say ?'

'Is that how it begins ?'

'My dear Lizzie, of course not. This is how it begins':—

'It is not our custom, as our readers are aware, to pass any opinion upon the quarterly reviews. From the nature of their publication, they are mostly stately commentaries on the past, and do not concern themselves, as it is our less agreeable task to do, with the topics of the day. Of late years, however, or, indeed, we may almost say of late months—so brief has been the existence of the periodical in question—there has appeared among this class of reviews a new candidate for public favour. It has appealed, not, as we understand, without success, to a larger audience, and has established no little reputation for originality of view. It has carefully abstained from siding with either this or that political party ; and by its wit and wisdom has recommended itself to both. To-day, however, the " Millennium " has made a new departure, though in what direction it is somewhat difficult to say. Its independence, it must be admitted, though still without any taint of Radicalism, as Radicalism is commonly understood, has taken the form of denunciation ; it lays an indictment against authority itself, and arraigns our whole social morality at the bar of conscience. The matter seems deserving of some notice, not only from the status of

the "Millennium" itself, but from the boldness and vigour of the article in question, which, under the somewhat ambitious title of "The Public Good," deals with the entire fabric of society. It is evident that the writer, who signs himself John Javelin, is not one of those who, while they are rarely so imprudent as to name a date, avow their belief in the "Good Old Times"; yet he insists that there were days—

When none were for a party,
But all were for the State,

or, at all events, when the public interest was held of more consequence, and the duties of citizenship were inculcated more generally, than at present.

"In these days," he says, "our duty to the State is the very last thing which is considered, even by moderately honest folks. Men that would not wrong their neighbour of a shilling have little scruple in making a false return of their income to the tax-gatherers. I have observed of late years that even those notifications in the newspapers from the Chancellor of the Exchequer concerning conscience-money have disappeared; the few people who had some lingering scruple in that way having apparently died out. Taxes of all kinds are looked upon in a totally different light from other debts, and the very last light in which they are viewed is that of debts of honour; to elude them is considered far from shameful, at worst as venial, at best as a clever stroke of business. This arises not so much from want of patriotism as from habit and example. For many generations the State has been looked upon as a milch-cow by both political parties, the members of which have got all they could out of it for their families and supporters as a matter of course, without the idea ever crossing their minds that they were robbing the Commonwealth.

"There is also another reason for this general unscrupulousness. It is much more easy to do our duty to our neighbour than to society at large. A board, or company, is considered fair game for deception; gentlemen, and especially gentlewomen, will pay half-fares for their children, when they travel by railway, long after they have passed the specified age. It does not strike them as a fraud, and even when discovered they are not overwhelmed with shame as they would be if caught cheating at cards. That 'fortuitous combination of atoms,' the Government, is regarded in the same way.

When a man dies, his heirs underrate the value of his property to diminish the probate duty; and, even in the hour of death, he will not seldom make some adroit disposal of it so as to elude the public due. Surely these things ought not so to be. It was, indeed, concerning modern times that the poet wrote, ‘The individual withers, and the world is more and more,’ but, as a matter of fact, the individual is very far from withering; while the world, as represented by his neighbours, grows of less and less account with him.”

‘The writer admits, indeed, that public spirit is not dead, and pays due honour to those societies which have been formed to defend popular rights (as, for example, in respect to open spaces in the neighbourhood of our towns) from private encroachment, but maintains that the rights of property have become so sacred that the very *raison d’être* of property is lost sight of. He holds the law itself to be blameworthy in the matter, and points out how the private wrong is always dealt with in our courts more severely than the offence against the State.

“To rob a fine lady’s jewel-drawer is a much more dangerous experiment than to break open a poor-box. The fact of the contents of the latter being for the poor—a common trust, which every citizen is capable of understanding—is never taken into account. To deface a statue in a private garden would be an offence punished at least as severely—probably more so—than the defilement of a public fountain out of what is strangely called ‘pure mischief,’ but which, in reality, arises from a hateful hostility to the general convenience. If the public good was the object of public interest that it ought to be, such offences would be treated with exceptional severity; but at present, not only is everybody’s business nobody’s business, but everybody’s property is regarded with far less solicitude than if it belonged to the individual.

“The same neglect of the public good is manifest, even as regards personal security. That odious and noxious weed, the ‘rough,’ is allowed to have his way with us in a manner unheard of save on the very outskirts of civilisation. It has been complained, by those who suffer from him, that the law would put him down quickly enough if those who make the law were in a position to feel his brutality: as matters are, thousands of helpless persons have a hard life made still less endurable for them by these brutal scoundrels. One who

knows life well has written of the rough that 'his conscience is the cat-o'-nine-tails'; but our sentimentalists (who are well out of the reach of his fists) are ready to faint at the notion of administering the lash to him; they think it will 'harden' his gentle nature. As it is manifest we cannot always keep our roughs locked up, I will suggest a method of getting rid of them and, at the same time, of utilising those virtues which they are supposed by the sanguine to possess. On their second offence, let them be placed in a regiment composed entirely of the same class, and officered by persons who are accustomed to deal with it. Whenever we are at war—as we almost always are with some 'most favoured nation' or another—let that regiment be first on the rota for foreign service. The superfluous physical energies, which are at present occupied in beating women and children, or inoffensive passers-by, will then be worthily employed; these gentry, who have been termed 'soldiers in the wrong place,' will then be in the right place, and have the opportunity afforded them of distinguishing themselves; they will literally have left their country 'for their country's good'—a phrase which for years has been only used with reference to transportation, and has now no signification at all."

'It is not only the law itself, however, but the administrators of the law, whom (with exceptions, however) the writer in the "Millennium" charges with being the cause of this state of affairs:—

"It would seem, indeed, from the sentences of most of our criminal judges, that the very last thing they have in their mind is the public good. It is probable that the upper classes are not aware of the widespread prevalence of cruelty and brutality in England at the present day. I notice that such cases are commonly excluded from the daily papers—on the ground, I suppose, of their being too painful in their details. It has been written, however, by a good and wise woman that 'we can surely bear to read about what other people have to endure'; and, at the risk of a little shuddering, I think it would be well if some of our kid-gloved gentry would buy some weekly paper for a penny next week, and cast their eye over the narratives—for they are sure to be there—of cruelty and wrong inflicted upon women and children, and other helpless persons, with the punishments, or rather the encouragements, awarded to the perpetrators. One English judge, indeed, who knew the subject on which he was writing,

has given his opinion of these wretches, and how they should be dealt with. ‘They are not men at all,’ he says, ‘in any moral sense: they are human tigers, and ought to be extirpated like the wild beasts they are.’ The punishment of death awarded to murderers may often be too severe: a murder may be committed in an uncontrollable fit of passion, and under great provocation. But there are criminals infinitely more dangerous to the public good than your mere murderer, and who should be punished at least as severely, but who, under present circumstances, receive terms of imprisonment, often infamously short, from which they emerge to make life intolerable to all who are in their power. It is admitted by the professors of every creed that to decrease the sum of human misery should be the aim of all men; whereas these creatures deliberately set themselves to work to increase it; while Justice looking on with folded hands, and milk-and-water humanitarianism, under the *alias* of philanthropy, pleads not for the victim, but for the tyrant.”

“Indeed,” this writer goes on to say, “what class of our fellow-countrymen are taught their duties to the State as a commonwealth? In those exclusive seminaries of learning where that mysterious and expensive article ‘the tone’ is supposed to be obtained, there is, indeed, some occasional reference in the educational course to the public good, but it is always in a dead language; and my experience is that dead languages do not, upon the average mind, create much impression. And yet it might be thought that in schools frequented by the flower of British youth who, in manhood, need not occupy themselves as others have to do in getting the means of livelihood, the science of the public good should be particularly studied. As for the other places where youths are educated, I do not know that our duty to the community in which we live is so much as hinted at in any of them; and yet, alas! it does not come by nature. It has been said by a bitter enemy of popular education that we now ‘teach everything except the Bible’; this is, probably, an exaggeration; but cannot a superfluous ‘ology’ be dropped, and in its place an occasional lesson taught concerning the duties of citizenship? In the next generation, then, it may perhaps be held that to cheat the State is as bad as to cheat one’s neighbour; that will be, at least, a step in the right direction, though far indeed from the true faith once prevalent—now all but dead—that the highest good is the public good.”

‘These are stirring words, and we are far from saying that they are wholly uncalled for. It is a pity, however, that the writer sometimes allows his zeal, which is considerable, to outrun his discretion. The following, for example, strikes us, to say the least of it, as audacious:—

“To judge by the way in which it is commonly spoken of, our very form of Government would seem to have become of more consequence than the commonwealth itself, for which governments exist at all. An English Admiral, engaged on what was then a national duty—fighting the Dutch—was informed, while at sea, that his country had changed its form of Government, and was asked what he proposed to do? ‘Do?’ he answered, ‘I shall do my duty to my country.’ He was the last man, however, of the grand old times. Everybody who was killed in battle in later days was described as having died for his ‘King and Country.’ Our Government being Constitutional, he should more accurately have been said to have died for ‘King, Lords, Commons, and Country’; and even then the phrase would be open to the objection of putting three carts before the horse. Most of us are agreed that monarchy is the best form of government; still, man was not made for monarchy, but the reverse. ‘*Pro patria*’ is a motto now only used by coach-builders; but there was surely more sense in it than in that which has been substituted for it. One can hardly imagine, for example, a man, however reckless of existence, dying for George the Fourth.”

‘There are many things true, some things new, and much that is good in “The Public Good,” but there is also a certain fanaticism—the indignation, rather than the enthusiasm of conviction—which offends those who are accustomed to weigh their words. There is nothing personal in the paper, yet somehow it suggests much of the writer’s vehemence springs from an individual wrong, which may even be his own. His denunciations have almost as much bitterness as strength in them; and without, as we have said, being Radical, the article is intensely Democratic. In this last respect we cannot congratulate the “Millennium” on its contributor; its line has been hitherto one of strict impartiality, from which we are sorry to see it diverge. On the other hand, it has brought to light a new ornament to literature, and yet not altogether new. The most remarkable feature in the matter is, indeed, that a paper like “The Public Good” should have proceeded from the same hand (unknown, as far as we are

‘aware, to fame) which gave us that exquisite picture of country life, “A Bit of Old England.”’

‘Goodness gracious me, what a dreadful mistake!’ cried Mrs. Richter, shrinking from the words she had just uttered, like Fear, in Collins’s ‘Ode,’ from the noise itself had made. ‘The idea of mixing you up with that audacious Mr. Javelin! What on earth is to be done?’

‘We must bring an action for libel, I suppose,’ said Lizzie, quietly. ‘I must talk to Mr. Argand about it.’

Here the door was opened by her maid, and her voice, in the accents of Cockaigne, announced Mr. Argand himself.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A HALF CONFIDENCE.

‘You have read the “Times,” I see,’ said Mr. Argand, smiling, as he shook hands with Mrs. Richter.

‘Yes, indeed, we have,’ returned that lady, looking unutterable things.

‘There is an article upon “The Public Good” in all the other papers,’ said the editor, complacently.

‘Let us hope they have not fallen into the same mistake; I call it most abominable, don’t you, Mr. Argand, that any one should confuse Lizzie with that dreadful Mr. Javelin?’

‘Dear me, I had quite forgotten!’ cried Mr. Argand, looking at Miss Dart, with an air of ludicrous penitence. In his pleasure and excitement, it had, in fact, escaped him that she had kept her identity with John Javelin from her aunt’s knowledge.

‘Forgotten it!’ exclaimed Mrs. Richter. ‘What, already! I am sure I shall never forget it. It is enough to make my poor husband, who was always devoted to the dear child, turn in his grave. The idea of her being “intensely Democratic!”’

‘That is only a conventional phrase of disapprobation,’ murmured Mr. Argand. ‘One must say something deprecia-tory in a review.’

‘Well, of course you ought to know,’ said Mrs. Richter, naïvely; ‘but I should be sorry indeed to see such remarks applied to anything that my niece wrote.’

'My dear,' said Lizzie, putting her arm round her aunt's little waist, and speaking very softly, 'I have a confession to make. When I first spoke to you about the "Millennium," I saw that you did not like my being the only female contributor it had, and felt that you would still less approve of my masquerading in it in male attire; but the mischief—if mischief it was—had been already done. I could not screw up my courage to tell you I had adopted the signature of "John Javelin."'

'Mercy me!' This was the strongest form of ejaculation in Aunt Jane's vocabulary.

'I am very sorry to have deceived you, but I did it for the best.'

'I am sure you did,' answered the little lady, gently; there was a pained expression in her kind face which found its way to her niece's heart, and the other perceived it and regretted it, like one who finds an arrow from her own bow in the heart of a friend. 'But, my darling, it does not signify,' she added, with inexpressible tenderness. 'I am a foolish old woman who, as you rightly concluded, should not be intrusted with State secrets.'

'It wasn't that,' said Lizzie, earnestly; 'I only wished to save you pain.'

'I know it, my dear;' and she cast a glance at the newspaper, which she still held in her hand, as much as to say, 'It is not you who have pained me, but this abominable print.'

Mr. Argand saw his opportunity, and seized the skirts of happy chance. 'My dear Mrs. Richter,' he interposed, 'is it possible you have not read "The Public Good"? I should have thought you were the very last person to condemn a fellow-creature without trial. Here is a copy of the "Millennium" which contains this terrible paper; please take it, and judge for yourself.'

She held her hand out with a gratified look, and left the room without a word.

'How very, very sorry I am!' exclaimed Miss Dart, regretfully. 'I am afraid she is wounded by my want of confidence in her.'

'Not so,' said Mr. Argand, confidently. 'She is only distressed at having expressed herself unfavourably of your production. She will come back as great an admirer of John Javelin as of yourself; and in so doing, my dear Miss Dart,

she will show her judgment ; I cannot tell you how delighted I am with the reception of your paper. It almost reconciles one with the critics. I have never known an article in a quarterly attract so much attention. Moreover—and this I know will gratify you more than anything else—I am convinced it will do great good.'

'I hope it will do some good to the "Millennium," at all events, said Lizzie, deprecatingly.

'It will do it an immense deal of good. But I am not always thinking of the "Millennium," I do assure you. You have already made two sensations ; do you know that in our literary weights and measures three sensations make a reputation ?'

'You are always so kind and encouraging, Mr. Argand.'

'To be encouraging is a natural branch of my business,' he replied ; 'though I seldom find such modest depreciation as in your case. Authors nowadays generally know their own value. Indeed, they are apt to value their productions at a fancy price.'

'That is the effect of imagination ; you see, I am not a writer of fiction.'

'No ; I wish you were. What you told me about yourself with respect to that matter was a disappointment to me. Now, if you could only have written novels ——'

'Well, what then ? You don't publish novels in the "Millennium" ?'

'I wish, my dear young lady, you would not fall into that habit of supposing that I am always thinking of my—well, of myself—for that is what it comes to.'

'I should be most ungrateful if I thought anything of the kind,' she answered, earnestly. 'There is, however, surely no harm in your love for your own child, as Miss Argand calls it.'

'You must not believe everything my sister says about me,' he answered, slowly walking up and down the room. 'She is an excellent woman, and is, I am well aware, devoted to me and my interests ; but she does not entirely understand me. I am not the literary machine which she would lead you to imagine. I have really *some* human feelings.' He spoke in a tone of annoyance, which she had never before heard him use, and which surprised her very much.

'It is difficult to make ourselves understood, even by our

nearest and dearest,' she replied. 'I have the same difficulty, in my little way, with Aunt Jane.'

'Has my sister ever spoken to you confidentially about my affairs?' he asked, abruptly.

'Certainly not. It was not a thing to be expected, in any case.'

'Why do you say, in any case?' he put in sharply. 'Do you mean that she is not confidential to you at all?'

'Well, she naturally prefers to make Aunt Jane, who is more of the same age, rather than myself, her confidante.'

'Then you hear everything all the same, though you hear it at second hand?' he said, stopping in his walk and regarding her with keen attention.

'It is true that Aunt Jane and I have no secrets from each other, except this one,' she answered lightly, pointing to the newspaper, with its review; 'but I do assure you, Miss Argand was very discreet. She has disclosed no secrets of the prison-house, in connection with profits or circulation.'

'There, again!' he cried, with irritation; 'why do you always associate me with my Review—as if I were a man made of proof-sheets, instead of flesh and blood?'

'Nay; were you not yourself speaking of your own "affairs," which it was reasonable for me to identify with those of the "Millennium"?''

He glanced at her with suspicion, which, even while he looked, seemed to fade away and give place to his usual frankness of expression.

'That is very true,' he said; 'and, after all, it is only natural that Joanna should gossip about it. I hope she told you, or rather your aunt, that the Review is doing very well, and especially that we have sold more of the number that had your article in it than of any other.'

'She did not do so; but I am delighted to hear it. I can fancy few things more satisfactory than the continuous success of a literary organ of one's own creation.'

'It is very pleasant, no doubt; and certainly I have nothing to complain of with respect to the "Millennium." Success, however, is a relative term; and it is impossible, with our material, to appeal to any very extensive public.'

'You mean, of course, that it flies over the heads of the million. To me, indeed, who have only lately known the million, it seems a marvel that you succeed as you do.'

'Well, since what readers we have are for the most part

well-to-do people, advertisers are glad to patronise us, you see; and advertisements are the life-blood of a periodical. Nevertheless, what I desire above all things is a great circulation. A first-rate and original novel might possibly obtain it.'

'I cannot imagine how people can like to read novels bit by bit.'

'That is what everybody says, yet no magazine can command a large circle of subscribers, without a serial novel; even the newspapers are adopting the same means of attracting their readers. The appetite for fiction is enormous, and grows by what it feeds on. Unhappily, good fiction is as rare as ever, but that is the fillip I want for the "Millennium."'

'It appears to me, Mr. Argand,' said Miss Dart, smiling, 'that, if not ungrateful, you are at least a little unreasonable in your expectations. If the "Millennium" were struggling for existence the case would be different; as it is, you remind me of the dinner guest in "Punch," who tells his hostess that, though not hungry, he is happy to say he is greedy.'

'A very just rebuke,' he observed, gravely, 'but, unhappily, one that comes too late.'

'How so?'

'Well, one's habits get ingrained, you see,' he answered; 'I am ambitious. Through ambition Cæsar fell.'

'He didn't want to get into Parliament, however,' said Miss Dart, silyly.

'Ah, it was foolish of me to let you into that secret,' he said, smiling. 'I feel it has given you a low opinion of me.'

'Nothing could ever give me that, Mr. Argand,' she answered, confidently.

His face for an instant glowed with pleasure; then clouded over with an intense sadness.

'The good opinion of those we respect is welcome to us,' he said, 'even when it is undeserved. I shall never betray any of my weaknesses to you again, but leave you to find them out for yourself.'

'Then you will be safe, for I shall never look for them.'

'There are others, however, who will point them out to you.'

'I shall not believe them.'

'Then you will be wrong,' he answered, vehemently. 'You cannot imagine how very weak I have been, Miss

Dart.' Again he took to pacing up and down the room, then suddenly stopped, and, looking steadfastly in her face, inquired—

'What is your opinion of a gambler?'

'Gambling is a matter of which I have no knowledge,' she answered, quietly.

'It is hardly likely that that circumstance should prevent your condemnation of it,' he put in, bitterly. 'The most violent anti-tobaccoite is the man who has never smoked; as the severest critic is the gentleman most ignorant of letters.'

'Perhaps I am allowing you to give me credit for charity where it is not deserved,' she replied, frankly. 'I have "no information," as "Bradshaw" says, of the motives that lead to the practice of which you speak; but my impression is that there are three kinds of gamblers: some actuated by greed; some who have a natural passion for excitement; and others, again, who are gamblers, if I may so express it, by circumstance, who, making haste to become rich for a particular purpose, take the shortest, and find it the longest, way round. These last may be taught by experience, the others, never. That, at least, is my poor opinion.'

'It is not the general view,' said Mr. Argand; 'but it is only like you to see the door of a *locus penitentie* which has escaped the eyes of others—— Here comes your aunt. Well, my dear Mrs. Richter, have you read the paper?'

'Don't speak of the paper, sir. I don't think I shall ever read a paper again; so unkind as it is, and so unfair——'

'I meant the article in the "Millennium,"' interrupted Mr. Argand, smiling—'your niece's article.'

'Oh, yes; I have read that, indeed, from first to last. It is simply beautiful! My dear Lizzie, how could such wonderful ideas ever get into your head? And how true it all is, especially about those adulterating shops, for as for cayenne pepper, there is not such a thing to be got, I do believe, within a mile of us. What can it be that makes people so wicked, Mr. Argand?'

'Perhaps it's the new red-brick houses which offer too great a temptation to the Italian warehousemen,' he answered, slyly.

'You think it's *that*, do you? Well, I am glad there is some excuse for them. I am sure, dear, this article will do ever so much good. It's almost like a sermon, is it not, Mr. Argand?'

As it was evident that Mrs. Richter intended by this parallel to convey a compliment to his contributor of a high kind, the editor replied 'Yes, indeed,' though without effusion.

'I am quite sure your uncle, dear, would have approved of it immensely,' continued Aunt Jane: 'there is much true religious feeling in it, though without dogmatism.'

Mr. Argand smiled, and rose to take his leave: matters which had looked at first a little awkward had evidently turned out in the most satisfactory manner. From the moment that Mrs. Richter understood that her niece had written 'The Public Good,' her mind had become open to conviction, and it would now have been difficult to find a more thick-and-thin admirer of its merits—a state of things which is not unexampled (though relationship, indeed, has nothing to do with it) in the very highest regions of Art and Literature. Lizzie, too, was well pleased to find the effects of the shock which she had unwittingly given Aunt Jane had passed off so quietly. But no sooner does one source of anxiety vanish in the human breast, than another succeeds it; her mind was now full of trouble upon Mr. Argand's account; it seemed to her that he had been on the point of telling her of some catastrophe which had happened to his own affairs. 'What is your opinion of a gambler?' he had asked her, with a bitter self-reproach in his tone that had showed its personal application. She would never have suspected him of such a weakness, or believed in its existence, save for the testimony of his own lips; but what surprised her, more even than the fact, was his voluntary confession of it. Not only had he never spoken to her of his private affairs before, but on this very occasion had seemed to express some apprehension of his sister's having done so. Why, then, had he himself done the very thing to which he objected in another?

Here came the postman's knock, which always awakened anxiety in Lizzie's bosom for news from Burrow Hall, where Mrs. Melburn, it was only too certain, was now drawing near her end.

He only brought a letter for her, however, from Mr. Argand himself—a mere official note from the 'Millennium' office, inclosing a cheque for fifty pounds.

For a moment she had a mind to send it back—an impulse which, on reflection, she repented of with a hot blush;

and, indeed, it would have been an impertinence that Mr. Argand would not easily have forgiven.

The 'Millennium,' it was certain, was prosperous enough; and whatever was amiss with the fortunes of its proprietor lay altogether outside of it.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

'OPINIONS IN STORIES.'

No article in a review, however striking, is a nine days' wonder; and 'The Public Good' would, without doubt, have gone the way of all similar contributions in a week, at farthest, but for a strange rumour that began to follow wherever its reputation penetrated, like an echo. It was said that it was written by a woman. Considering the nature of the article in question, this circumstance, if true, was certainly—as the world agreed—remarkable. How the report originated was doubtful; perhaps the opinion that Mr. Herbert, the great critic, had expressed respecting the first paper, by the same author, was, by mistake, transferred to the second; or, perhaps, the critic himself professed to find in the second paper the corroboration of his previous view. But, within a very few days of the appearance of the number of the 'Millennium' in question, it was announced in a society journal that Mr. John Javelin was a lady; whereupon arose a considerable controversy. Some asserted—on the most irreproachable, though necessarily circumstantial, evidence—the writer to be a man; others insisted that this or that particular literary touch could only have been given by a woman; and some indignant with a problem that they could not solve, and expressing themselves in what they confidently believed to be epigram, affirmed that whether man or woman, one thing at least was certain—the writer was neither gentleman nor lady.

Mr. Argand declared that a misery of which he had never dreamed was added to his unhappy lot as an editor. Letters arrived by every post, from the 'dear Duchess' who dabbles in literature up to the most established names in poetry and fiction, all beseeching him, if the name of his contributor was to be a mystery, at least to tell them, in the strictest confidence, 'yes' or 'no' as to the sex. They even sent him a stamped

envelope for a reply. 'Thanks to you, my dear Miss Dart,' he said, 'I have actually found out a new way of making enemies. As to revealing the matter to any one of these applicants, it would, indeed, have been to make it public at once.' 'You know I can keep a secret, my dear Mr. Argand,' wrote one impassioned lady—a somewhat compromising assurance, to which he prudently rejoined, 'I hope I can keep one, too.' The feelings of Miss Dart, who was all for secrecy, had to be consulted; and, moreover, his own advantage obviously lay in the same direction. The edition of the 'Millennium' in which 'The Public Good' appeared was devoured within three days; and another and another were called for. The article was quoted in 'the House,' with cheers, and—even better—with hisses. It was said that a famous writer in the 'Quarterly,' forgetful of etiquette and the politeness due to a rival, had sworn to demolish it in the April number. It was the topic of conversation at every table where literature had any attraction at all. At that of Mr. Argand, a certain reticence upon the subject was naturally observed; but it was often alluded to. To have her opinion asked upon her own production was, at first, a little embarrassing to Lizzie; but she soon got used to it, and it tickled her sense of humour. No one imagined it to be within the limits of possibility that a young lady of her appearance and demeanour could have taken Society by the throat in so vigorous a manner.

Lizzie could talk charmingly and brightly enough, but it was her *rôle* to be a listener—to observe, and not to comment. Nothing, however, escaped her notice. What delighted her most was when some man of intelligence would amuse himself by 'drawing her out' into some region of thought far, as he imagined, beyond her depth; or endeavoured to dazzle her with his intellectual coruscations. He gave her, indeed, as he flattered himself, much more than he received; but he little knew it was only in the form of 'material.' While appearing to be out of her depth, she was, in reality, but treading water or plumbing his own shallows. Modest as was her opinion of herself, it was difficult not to feel a certain consciousness of superiority born of involuntary comparison. The person of whom she learned most was, however, undoubtedly Mr. Argand; whose mind was, to some extent, the complement of her own, and whose unlikeness fitted hers to a nicety. Not a word did he speak

to her, since his visit on the occasion that has been described, respecting his own affairs; but on other matters she had learned to talk with him with entire unreserve. He paid her the compliment, seldom vouchsafed by man to woman, to converse on speculative and spiritual subjects—'Fate, Free-will, Fore-knowledge absolute.' Complete friendship cannot exist between men without the exchange of this sort of confidence: it is not necessary that there should be an agreement, but there must be some confession of faith, or of the absence of faith. Between women, such speculations are scarcely ever entertained; and between men and women, as has been said, but rarely: when they are so, however, they form a very strong bond of sympathy. Never before had Elizabeth Dart met with a fellow-creature to whom it had been possible to confide those thoughts on Being and *not* Being—those weak solutions of 'the riddle of the painful Earth' which intrude dimly, once and again, on most minds, but which with others are far more urgent and importunate. It is seldom, indeed, anything of a practical nature comes of it; but in this case something did come. Miss Dart conceived the idea of recording her spiritual and philosophical views of mankind after an entirely novel fashion. It was neither essay nor allegory, and still less was it one of those exhaustive treatises which leave the opinion of nineteen twentieths of the human race out of the question as valueless, just as the clergyman excused himself for neglecting his cure of souls upon the ground that they were not worth saving. In this remarkable production, the creed of ordinary folk for the first time found expression. She called it 'Opinions in Stories'—a somewhat fanciful title, which, after some discussion with her editor, was, however, adopted.

The scheme of it was simple enough: an ordinary dwelling house was, as it were, the stage on which this drama of speculation was enacted. There was first the dining-room, in which that sort of desultory talk took place between the men over the walnuts and the wine which sometimes occurs when the topic of the Future is introduced. There was the smoking-room, where the tongue, even on the most sacred subjects, grows more free and audacious; and there was the drawing-room, where men and women together—the same topic being retained—discoursed, as it were, on tip-toe, and not without reference to the clergyman of the parish. It was well for

Miss Dart that she had taken her editor into her confidence, since, without his assistance in the matter, her representation of affairs would, notwithstanding her great powers of intuition, have been necessarily incomplete: even as it was, they amazed him. A hint dropped here and there into her ear had given her the key to systems of thought which she had reproduced in their entirety, just as the professor of natural history evolved his whole animal from a thigh-bone; nor was humour wanting to give naturalness to discussion, and remove it from the atmosphere of mere theology. At Mr. Argand's suggestion, she greatly enlarged her original plan. The servants' hall, and even the kitchen were included in it, with John Thomas's view 'of another place,' and Mary Jane's idea of 'bettering herself' in a future sphere. But what, above all things, enhanced the attraction of this really unique production, was the pathos and beauty of that part of it entitled 'The Sick-Chamber,' where, by the pillow of the dear and dying, the about-to-be-left-desolate finds himself face to face with a question that has, hitherto, only presented itself to him as a subject for cynical or humorous speculation.

'I know nothing like this in the language,' was Mr. Argand's observation, when she read to him, in the back drawing-room in Harewood Square—which was always the scene of collaboration—that portion of her MS. She laughed at his enthusiasm, though it brought a flush of pleasure to her cheek. 'You may laugh, my dear Miss Dart,' he answered, gravely; 'but, the fact is, it is too good for the "Millennium,"' an observation which—as she afterwards ventured to tell him—seemed to throw his first eulogium, high as it was, completely into the shade. What he meant was that he had scruples about putting into his own columns that which he honestly believed would, if published separately, achieve for her a reputation. Miss Dart knew how to appreciate such generosity without taking advantage of it. She had, indeed, designed her contribution especially for Mr. Argand's review, with a mischievous intent (for which perhaps she would have been ashamed had not the Great Wizard of the North, in somewhat similar circumstances, set her the example) of still further mystifying its readers as to her own identity. For 'Opinions in Stories' looked as little likely to have come from a woman's hand as a contribution well could do; while Mr. Argand's touches, or rather his suggestions—for every line

of it was her own—seemed to put the matter beyond all question.

It was impossible that editor and contributor should thus lay their heads together without being brought into close contact, and seeing much more of one another than heretofore. Yet their personal relations remained unchanged. Mr. Argand's admiration for the genius of his protégée, as it developed before his eyes, was without disguise. His praises, which, though generous, had hitherto been expressed with judiciousness and caution, now knew no stint. He was no longer the master; indeed, that he had never been, for he had always recognised attainments in her that were beyond his teaching; he was no longer the Mentor to her Telemachus; he was scarcely even the commentator of her work, but confined himself to such literary services as are hinted at in footnotes by the syllable '*sugg.*' in italics. But with all his appreciation and approval of her, and his obvious interest in her productions, there was no increase of warmth in his manner; on the contrary, despite his kindness, which was unceasing, and which displayed itself in a hundred ways, his tone was at times so cold—as it seemed to her, so studiously cold—that she almost feared she had offended him.

Her relations with Miss Argand had, on the other hand, improved, or at least that lady had become, of late, more gracious to her, and on one occasion Lizzie had ventured to ask her whether Mr. Argand was out of health.

'Why do you ask?' was the quick rejoinder, accompanied by a glance which seemed to search her very soul.

'Only that I have fancied that he has seemed depressed—and overworked.'

'Such a clever young woman as you should know that work never hurt anybody,' returned Miss Argand, drily. Then, perceiving that her speech had given pain, she added, more gently, 'My brother is a little worried just now; you must not take any notice of it.'

As Miss Dart looked up in the elder lady's face, she saw the tears in her eyes; and instantly her own were filled with sympathetic dew.

'I am very, very sorry,' she murmured, timidly.

'I am sure you are—— There, there—don't let's talk about it.'

All the arts of diplomacy directed towards an *entente cordiale* faded into insignificance beside one involuntary touch of

nature; and from that moment the two women understood one another. Though Lizzie's fears were thus corroborated, as respected the state of Mr. Argand's affairs, it was a comfort to her to be assured that there was no other reason for his depression. To a true woman's mind, 'money troubles' have never the importance that they assume with men. 'What matters, if you have but health and strength, my son?' says the mother consolingly. 'What matters, so long as we are still together, my darling?' smiles the loving wife.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A CHANCE MEETING.

ONE morning Miss Dart received a note from Mr. Argand written at the office of his review. It was his wont to keep his business and his social affairs as distinct and separate as his correspondents would permit him to do. In Harewood Square, unless they were in the back drawing-room together, which he playfully termed the 'shop,' he never spoke to Lizzie of his literary plans, while from his place of business he never wrote except on subjects connected with publication. It was his theory that a man should leave all thoughts of his daily work along with its toils in his office, and never permit them to intrude upon his leisure or pleasure.

'You will, no doubt, expect from the address upon my notepaper,' he began, 'that I have got something to say to you as respects your forthcoming article; even that would have a very considerable flavour of self about it, but as it happens my pen is dipped in self—*pur sang*, the very blackest fluid. A manuscript has been received here concerning which I am in want of another opinion, and there is no one to whom I look with greater confidence for it than yourself. It is a novel—of which class of literature I see a great deal more than enough. It is in type writing. I do not say that I should not otherwise have looked at it, but the circumstance, no doubt, attracted me to it. I took it up after luncheon over a cigar, and I only just lay it down, half read, at six P.M. This fact, of course, is worth many columns of criticism, and under ordinary circumstances I should not mistrust the impression it implies; but I have not been quite myself of late. The

doctor tells me my "nervous centres are disorganised," which is, I suppose, a euphemism for the liver being out of order; at all events, when one is out of sorts I have noticed that both one's approval and disapproval upon literary matters are apt to be exaggerated. To confess the honest truth, I cannot trust myself to say what I think just now of this novel: perhaps to-morrow I may take, like the French gentleman, with his "superbe—magnifique—pretty vell," a much less rapturous view. I am taking the thing home with me, to finish it to-night I trust—and it will be left with you in the morning. Read it carefully, don't hurry over it as I have done, and then let me know your opinion. The author—for I am sure it is a man—gives only his initials and an address at a post-office; but the communication which accompanies his contribution is characteristic enough:—

"Dear Sir,—I forward you a novel entitled 'The Usher.' I offer you the use of it, that is, its serial right in the 'Millennium,' for 200%. It is worth that at least to you, or it will be worth nothing; in the latter case be so good as to return it to me registered, for which purpose I enclose the necessary stamps. Address M. M., Post-office, Euston Street."

'Short and sweet, is it not? though there is not much light with the sweetness. Who can it be? It is no writer one knows, I'm certain, but quite a new hand. For one second it struck me that it might be your young friend, Matthew Meyrick; but there is nothing but the similarity of the initial to suggest such a thing. The real Simon Pure, whoever he is, knows the world well, and has had, I should say, no very pleasant experience of it. However, I am forgetting that you have not been introduced to M. M., or rather to his MS., which will arrive by hand (for safety's sake) very soon after this note. I am very impatient for your opinion.' Then came a postscript which made Lizzie smile. 'I think that no time should be lost in sending "The Usher" to the printers. If the first chapters could appear side by side with your own admirable article, we are pretty certain to have a double-barrelled success in the next number. What do you say?'

It was clear to Miss Dart that whatever she said would, under these circumstances, have but little effect upon the fate of the MS. in question; but, nevertheless, she gave her best attention to it. To speak of 'The Usher' here would be superfluous; the time is past for criticising a work about

which the public has long made up its mind. The only interest that the matter could now possess would be in the impressions that a book so well known to the world conveyed to the mind of a reader on its first appearance. Let it suffice to say that Lizzie, though not insensible to its merits, was unable to accord the measureless approbation that was expected of her. She acknowledged that the novel was original; she was even tempted, in some places, to think very highly of it; but on the whole, with Mr. Argand's eulogy ringing in her ears, it disappointed her. The story of the despised drudge who develops such talents as a painter, and in his immense prosperity awards good and evil, like a small providence, to the companions of his youth, reminded her of Monte Cristo, and suffered by the comparison. The characters were lifelike enough, she confessed, but too photographic; they lacked shade. The satire seemed not only bitter but personal; some of the portraits, indeed only fell short of caricature because there was so little good nature about them: they resembled lampoons. These opinions, with some pruning, she set down in writing, and sent to Mr. Argand. 'A thousand thanks,' he wrote back by return of post; 'I could not have thought that any criticism could have given me so much pleasure. From the manner in which you have always received my advice, I had begun to think you too "nobly planned"—a contributor too pure and good for an editor's daily, or even quarterly, food. Now, I perceive that you are human, after all. Your grudging appreciation of "The Usher" betrays the sex of Mr. John Javelin. It is also her excuse. My dear Miss Dart, you are jealous.'

It was plain that she had made him angry; nor can it be denied that he had some reason to be so. The manager of an operatic company who has discovered a novice with a voice is naturally outraged when his judgment on so delicate a matter is impugned; and when the objection comes from a lady who is herself a professional singer, the explanation of it is only too obvious. The matter, in fact, which only moved Lizzie to mirth, disturbed Mr. Argand for four-and-twenty hours—until he saw her. Then they had it out together in a manner entirely satisfactory to him—that is to say, he got everything his own way.

'You allow,' he said, 'that there is a certain rough vigour about the story?'

She nodded.

‘And you admit that it is original?’

She hesitated, but at last consented with another nod.

‘And, at all events, there is no doubt, if one is to admit fiction into the “Millennium” at all, that here is an opportunity?’

‘Of that, of course, Mr. Argand, you are the best judge.’

‘Very good!’ he exclaimed, complacently. ‘I was convinced that, upon reflection, you would come over to my opinion.’

The incident is narrated not only as affording an excellent example of how to conduct an argument and bring it to a satisfactory conclusion, but because it will afterwards be reverted to.

In the meantime, however, other events took place which put literary affairs out of Lizzie’s head. The long-expected letter announcing Mrs. Melburn’s death arrived from Caster-ton. Mrs. Meyrick, Matthew wrote, had been summoned to Burrow Hall, and would presently bring Mary back to the Look-out, probably to stay there an indefinite time. There had been troubles at the Hall of other kinds—some dispute between the Squire and Jefferson, who had sold out of the Army, and had been living at home—about money matters. It was rumoured that Mr. Melburn’s affairs were seriously involved. The idea of Mary’s coming to Casterton ‘for good’ was, of course, inexpressibly welcome to the writer; but there was an air of melancholy throughout his letter quite apart from the tidings it conveyed, for which, indeed, everyone had been long prepared, and that seemed to speak of failing health. ‘If you can tear yourself away from your beloved London, when the summer weather comes on, it would be a charity to come and see us,’ he wrote. ‘We are, as usual here, in a state of stagnation, only dear old Roger is greatly excited by the circumstance of Battle Hill being offered for sale. What horrifies him even more than the fact itself, is that it is recommended in the advertisement as an excellent site for building purposes. He already sees, in imagination, a row of villa residences, spick and span, erected over the bones of the Danish host, and their ill-gotten treasures thereby put further out of reach than ever; it is with difficulty that the dear old gentleman can be restrained from selling his all, and placing the proceeds in this very unproductive investment. The whole thing is offered at what certainly seems a cheap price, but, unfortunately, not for a song, or you would have to con-

gratulate me upon being a landed proprietor. Nothing would give me greater pleasure—or let us say few things’—(for Lizzie there was a pathos in this reservation) ‘than to give old Roger Leyden the title-deeds of Battle Hill upon his next birthday: on the other hand, it is to be feared that he would at once set to work with pick and spade, and ruin himself in a fortnight. How nice it would be, if somebody of taste, who admired our little town, and who is making quite a fortune, as we hear, by literature, in London, would come down and buy the Hill. This could be done for two or three hundred pounds; a charming little cottage could be built upon it for as much again, to which she would bring her excellent aunt, and, with the help of some appreciative neighbours, they would live happy ever afterwards. Alas! my dear Miss Dart, this is but a dream, I know. Such good fortune is not to be expected out of fairyland. Let us hope that the sleep with which our little life is rounded may have such dreams.’

This letter not only filled its recipient with sad thoughts on Mary Melburn’s account, but on that of the writer. She was moved to go down to Casterton, and comfort—so far as it lay in her power to do so—that unhappy pair. It also increased in her the yearning she had long entertained to revisit that dear old town by the sea, where she had first looked real happiness in the face. Perhaps in the summer, if matters went as well with her as they promised to do, this would be possible. How delightful it would be, to exchange the heat and dust and noise of the town for the fresh breezes of quiet Casterton! How charmed Aunt Jane would be with it! Dreadful as Mary’s loss must for the present appear to her, she would have a far happier life with Mrs. Meyrick than she had ever had at home, if only Matthew was spared to them—a momentous ‘if’ indeed: for as to any complete hope of recovery that seemed farther off from the poor lad than ever.

Lizzie sat down and wrote a long letter of condolence to Mary, full of genuine love and sympathy, but not with the complete naturalness she would have wished. She respected Mrs. Melburn’s character, and intensely pitied her; but her heart had never been attracted to her as it had been towards her daughter.

She had been one of those women who live and suffer for their own belongings only; the tendrils of whose sympathy cling to what is immediately near them, but do not extend beyond it. Nevertheless, Miss Dart was heavy at heart

because of her. She felt very disinclined for society, and much regretted that Mrs. Richter and herself had promised to accompany Mr. Argand and his sister to the opera that evening ; but a box had been placed at his disposal, a circumstance which did not often occur, and she knew that her absence would greatly disappoint him. How often it happens that we attend scenes of gaiety from reasons altogether disconnected with their attractions, though our presence is always taken as a sign of lightheartedness ! There is a certain eloquent divine of the English Church against whom it is cast up to this day that he used to play cards at college on a Sunday. The statement is true ; but, so far as it implies an accusation, absurdly false. Grave, even in his adolescence, he disliked all games, and abstained from them ; but one of his friends fell ill, and, to ease his pain, would often play at cribbage. On week-days he had plenty of companions to play with him ; but on Sundays he found it difficult to find one ; whereupon the embryo divine volunteered to be his playmate : an act of self-sacrifice that has cost him more than he was aware of at the time, or that, being a man of sense, he had thought possible ; but which, nevertheless, he has never regretted. If the eye of observation scans the rows of a crowded theatre, it is not difficult to discover those who have come to be amused from that large minority who have no such object in view, but who find themselves there from force of circumstances : there are as grave faces to be found in boxes as in pews ; unmoved by what is going on upon the mimic stage, they are wrapt in some drama of real life which is being enacted within them, and only when 'waked with silence,' as the curtain falls, do they become conscious of their surroundings.

It was in this uncongenial frame of mind that Lizzie found herself seated by Mr. Argand that evening at the opera. He addressed her more than once, but it was with difficulty that she compelled her attention to what he said. Her eyes rarely sought the stage, but wandered over the house, the comparative monotony of which allowed her thoughts more freedom ; the loud notes of the singers reached her ears, but penetrated no further ; the doorways of her brain were closed to them. Her thoughts were now in the chamber of death at Burrow Hall, now upon the windy downs it looked upon, and now on the summit of Battle Hill, with the far-stretching marsh and endless sea beneath her. Amid these scenes only

a small portion of her life had been spent, yet its chief events had lain there. Her greatest happiness had come to her there, and also her greatest misery; the shock of it, she knew, had changed the whole course of her existence; and the remembrance of it still filled her with pain and shame. She was now on the jetty of Casterton, alone; the wild waste of water weltered cold and grey around her; a few seagulls were circling in the evening sky, and uttering at intervals a wild and discordant cry; when suddenly the scene vanished with the celerity of a dissolving view, and she became aware of two black spots—an opera-glass was being levelled at her from the opposite box. She gazed mechanically at its inmates. One was a thin, cadaverous man, still young, but with all the premature signs of age; so terrible was the alteration his mode of life had wrought in him since she had seen him last, that she would, perhaps, have failed to recognise him as Mr. Winthrop, but for his companion, who held the glass, and was pointing it at her still with insolent persistence: it was impossible to mistake Jefferson Melburn for any other man.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AFTER-DINNER CRITICS.

THE baleful vision which Miss Dart had seen in the opera-house would not, under ordinary circumstances, perhaps, have much disturbed her. It was not as if she still nourished a single sentimental regret in connection with Jefferson Melburn. He had power only to disgust, not to wound her. But, as it happened, the meeting had taken place when she was nervous and unhinged; and, though she contrived to conceal its occurrence from her friends, it seriously affected her. The knowledge that this man was in London, and might possibly be again brought face to face with her, preyed upon her spirits. She had been working very hard of late, and was conscious of a need for rest she had never felt before. On the other hand, she could not afford two outings in the year, and it was imprudent thus to anticipate the summer. Nature in spring-time calls those in city pent into the woods and fields; but it is only the rich who can afford to obey her summons at that period. When a shipwrecked company have

only a small stock of provision for a long voyage, they must eke it out as best they can; if they take their fill of food at first, they will have none left to eat in days when they will want it more. And thus it is with a great majority of us in respect to holidays. We yearn to leave this living tomb of town when the leaves come on the trees; but a time will come, we know, when it will be still more intolerable to dwell in it, and we postpone our holiday till then. All we can do, in the meantime, when we find ourselves run down or out of sorts, is to try a tonic. About this time Miss Dart had one presented to her, in the form of a piece of good news—an ounce of which, as is well known, is worth a ton of bark. The April number of the 'Millennium' came out, and 'Opinions in Stories' was received with universal approbation. Had it stood alone, the article could hardly have failed to attract public attention; but as the third of a trilogy, of which two had already made their mark, it created an immense sensation. Those who had asserted that its predecessors had been written by a woman were, however, contrary to Mr. Argand's expectations, by no means silenced. Masculine and vigorous as the style was by all admitted to be, there were some who contended that the 'Death Chamber' could only have been written by a female hand. The review, within a few weeks, reached a pinnacle of success it had never attained before.

At a dinner-party at Harewood Square, at which Miss Dart was present, this circumstance became the subject of conversation.

'Is it a State secret, or not, Argand,' inquired one of the guests, 'that the "Millennium" has doubled its circulation this month?'

'It is certainly not a State secret,' said Mr. Argand, smiling: 'on the contrary, I am happy to say it is a simple fact.'

'But that is not Mr. John Javelin's doing,' observed another guest, in a dry tone. The speaker was a Mr. Davies, who, not content with being the terror of authors in the 'Weekly Weasel,' had actually republished his own criticisms in book form. 'I have no doubt his essays, or whatever he terms them, are popular with a certain class; but nobody's essays ever doubled the circulation of anything. It must be the story that has done it.'

'That is what you have said in the "Weasel" already,'

said Mr. Argand, sharply, for he was annoyed that such a discussion should have been raised before Miss Dart. He had confidence in her good sense, and knew that she took a tolerably philosophic view of criticism; but then the critics had hitherto been favourable to her. They were so now, only some of them had turned away from her to worship the rising sun—the anonymous author of ‘The Usher.’

There was no doubt that, great as had been the sensation made by Miss Dart’s productions, it had been equalled, if not surpassed, by that of her new rival.

‘I remark that while rapping Davies’s knuckles,’ observed another guest, a Mr. Elliott, a critic renowned for his severity, ‘our host has omitted to answer his question. Is it possible, I wonder, that both novelist and essayist are here present amongst us, and that he does not, for his life, dare give an opinion as to which has raised the circulation, for fear of offending the other?’

‘And also for fear of having to increase his scale of remuneration,’ added Mr. Davies, acidly.

Amid the laughter which followed this sally, the ladies rose.

‘I wonder whether Argand’s rival contributors are with us now or not?’ observed the incorrigible Elliott; ‘to judge by the look of relief upon his face, one would imagine them both to have gone upstairs.’

‘No woman ever wrote “The Usher,” I’ll take my oath,’ ejaculated Davies, bluntly.

‘Will you venture a five-pound note upon that?’ observed a quiet voice. It came from Mr. Herbert, who was a man not given to much speaking, but who, when he did speak, was listened to in literary circles with respectful attention. He was not, like Messrs. Davies and Elliott, a tomahawk critic; he thought less of being smart himself (and of making his author smart) than of doing justice to a book; but his tongue was like a whip, and, at the smack of it, curs hid themselves.

The positive one was silenced. ‘Davies reminds me, Mr. Herbert,’ observed Elliott, in his silkiest manner, ‘of the prudent schoolboy—“Will you take your oath?” “Yes.” “Will you take your dying oath?” “Yes.” “Will you bet sixpence?” “No.” Perjury has no fears for him; but he draws the line at speculative investment.’

‘Why is it you think “The Usher” may have been written by a woman, Herbert?’ inquired Mr. Argand, earnestly. ‘It

is a matter on which I really seek for information, for the MS. came to me anonymously ; nor have I the least clue as to the writer.' This statement made not a little sensation, for Mr. Argand's word was not to be doubted.

'You are deuced peculiar as well as fortunate in your secrets, Argand,' observed Davies, grudgingly ; 'notwithstanding that all our writers in the "Weasel" are anonymous, there is very little difficulty, I fancy, in finding out the real Simon pure.'

'Does any one ever want to find them out ?' inquired Mr. Elliott.

'I think I recognise a woman's hand in "The Usher,"' observed Mr. Herbert, taking no more notice of this passage of arms than a great St. Bernard of the quarrel between two pugs, 'for two reasons : it is at once too tender and too bitter for a man's work.'

'And its merits ; what do you think of them ?'

'I scarcely like to say. There is not enough of it at present on which to form an opinion.'

'I have read the whole of it,' said Mr. Argand ; 'and in my judgment, it keeps up its present interest to the end.'

'Then there is no novel published within the last quarter of a century with which it need fear comparison,' said Mr. Herbert, confidently.

'That's not saying much for it,' muttered Mr. Elliott, spitefully.

'Elliott looks on the great works of literature,' said Mr. Herbert, 'as other folks look on the horizon. Whenever he approaches them, so far as their greatness is concerned, they vanish. He is like the people who praise the good old times ; they decline to fix on any old time in particular, but retire farther and farther back, till they and their praise together are lost in the mist of ages. His counterpart in the next century will be crushing the contemporary novelist by comparing him with the giant author of "The Usher."'

Mr. Herbert's opinion of the novel was very welcome to Mr. Argand, for he had great confidence in his judgment. On the other hand, strangely enough, he found himself grudging the unknown author not only his praise, but his success. As the editor, and still more as the proprietor, of the 'Millennium,' this feeling was as unnatural as it was unaccountable ; but he could not help feeling mortified, not, as he told himself over and over again, upon Miss Dart's account, but on his

own, that her contribution had taken the second place in the public estimation. Like a violet by a mossy stone, her genius had been hidden from the eye till he had discovered it; though he had not planted, he had watered and nourished it; and he had taken a natural pride in the admiration excited by its beauty. With her anonymous rival it was impossible he could feel this sympathy. Whether 'The Usher' was superior to 'Opinions in Stories' or to Miss Dart's other essays was not, indeed, the question. No comparison could possibly be made between them. The fact of the former being a fiction—other things being equal, or even nearly equal—was quite sufficient to account for its greater popularity. Still, it troubled him.

He had not been serious when he had written to Miss Dart that her want of appreciation of the new novelist had been caused by jealousy; he was jealous for her, but he knew that she herself was superior to any such sentiment, and that the news of the success of 'The Usher' would give her genuine pleasure. Yet hitherto he had forbore to speak of it. This evening, however, on finding himself next to her in the drawing-room, he was induced to do so. The topic arose out of the conversation that had taken place below-stairs.

'What is the matter, Mr. Argand?' inquired Miss Dart, softly, as he took his seat beside her. 'It's no use to answer "Nothing;" something, I am sure, has ruffled you.'

'Nothing can escape your eye, I know; well, something *has* ruffled me. It is very foolish, of course, to allow oneself to be put out by such trifles; but to have to listen to the chatter of such men as Davies and Elliott as their host—that is, without the right of rejoinder—is rather a trial.'

'And what have they been talking about?'

'You.'

'Good gracious! What could such eminent individuals have to say about me?'

'Well, of course they did not know that it was you they were discussing. Elliott was, as usual, eloquent on the decline and fall of literature, of which, forsooth, he had the impudence to quote 'Opinions in Stories' as an example. He declared there have been no essays worth reading since the "Spectator." "What!" I said, wishing to give the man a loophole of escape from his own attic, "not even in the 'Indicator'?" He answered "No," in a manner that con-

vinced me he had never read it, and then went rambling on against all modern writers in that spitefully apish manner which is my peculiar aversion. It would have done you good to hear Herbert answer him. He reminded us how the praise of the past at the expense of the present has been a favourite practice in all ages; how Goldsmith suffered from it in his time, as no doubt Shakspeare did in his, and traced its origin to the same cause as that which produces the worship of high birth in the vulgar. They pretend to admire it above intellectual gifts, in order to belittle those of their own class who happen to possess them.'

'He meant, then, by analogy to imply that the person who denies genius to the writer of his own time is generally himself a failure,' observed Lizzie. 'Was that not rather hard upon Mr. Elliott?'

'Not a bit of it; besides, his skin is like that of a rhinoceros. I only wish Davies had given Herbert the same chance of putting in his left. But Davies, though impudent, is not courageous. The idea of his having said in his mangy paper that "The Public Good" may have been a striking essay, but it was not literature!'

'But why should he not say so if he thinks so?' inquired Miss Dart, smiling.

'But he does not think so, any more than Elliott thinks that this is the brazen age of fiction; it is only he who is brazen, and he knows it.'

'But these poor creatures do nobody any harm,' argued Lizzie.

'True, but they mean harm; they are the curs that bark at the heels of success, and they would unhorse the rider, if they could, for very spite.'

'I wish I could be angry with them to oblige you, Mr. Argand; but I suppose they take some pleasure in barking, and as they cannot bite, what does it matter?'

'You are too good-natured, my dear Miss Dart. If you were not so, I should hesitate to tell you of the success that "The Usher" is attaining.'

'Why, you don't suppose because that proves your good judgment with respect to the attraction of the work, and my own appreciation of it to be too cold, that I should be otherwise than pleased, surely? I am delighted to hear that it is so much liked.'

'I am sure you are. Envy and jealousy were left out of

your disposition from the first, just as there are some oranges without pips.'

'So far as "The Usher" is concerned—though please to observe I take no credit for that—I certainly feel neither. Has it really had a good effect upon the circulation of the "Millennium"?''

'A very great effect. It is not only the public who are charmed with it, but what is of much greater consequence to the author—the publishers.'

'Isn't that the same thing?'

'Not at all. The public is sometimes sweet upon an author when the publishers cannot be persuaded to be so, while the contrary happens still more often. I have known writers continue to sell their MSS. whose books cannot be sold. There is a great deal more sentiment in "the trade" than is generally suspected. But "The Usher" has done well with both parties. Look at that!'

He put in her hand a letter from a great magnate of Paternoster-row.

'Dear Argand,—Will you be so good as to forward the inclosed to your new author. In my opinion he will go far; and I trust to your good offices to bring us together. If you think my proposition, which I leave open in more senses than one, is likely to fall short of his expectation, be so good as to let me know, and I will remodel it.'

With this note was another, addressed to M. M., in which, after certain stipulations as to the length of the story, a thousand pounds was offered for the copyright of 'The Usher.'

'That seems a large sum,' observed Miss Dart. 'I suppose you will advise the gentleman to accept it.'

'I shall do nothing of the sort. If he does not choose to confide in me, I shall certainly not volunteer my advice.'

'I did not think you could be so unkind, Mr. Argand. You knew nothing of me, but my name, in my case.'

'That was very different,' he answered, softly. 'I draw the line at initials. One is not interested in the spiritual welfare of "M or N" in the Catechism.'

'And what do you think M. M. will do as respects this offer?'

'He will jump at it, of course, and thereby prove himself to be not quite so clever a gentleman as he thinks himself. He ought to sell the book for a term of years. I only wish,

my dear Miss Dart, that this Monarch of the Row would bid as highly for what is just as meritorious, though in another way. When you have written essays enough to make up a volume, we shall find out how far his appreciation extends in that direction.'

'Then I may hope that the "Millennium" is not quite tired of me yet?' said Miss Dart, gaily.

'It will always be glad to get you for its contributor, you may be very sure, whatever happens,' observed Mr. Argand, in tones grave even to sorrowfulness. She looked up quickly, with sympathising face, but he had already risen, and was addressing himself to another guest. 'What could he have meant,' she wondered, 'by that Whatever happens?' If he was thinking of separating himself from the review, it would be grief indeed to her; the assurance that he had given of her permanent connection with it in any case, would in that contingency be but small comfort: for the review was what bound them together, and if that bond should snap, there would be no excuse for their meeting; for those conversations, which gave such a charm to life; for that companionship, which would, if withdrawn, be such an inexpressible loss to her.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

REVISITED.

'SHOULD you like a little trip into the country, Aunt Jane?' inquired Lizzie, as they sat at breakfast one morning, a few days after the dinner-party at Harewood Square.

'What a question, my dear? You might as well ask me if I should like a glimpse of heaven. The only drawback in both cases would be that I should have to come back again. Shall it be Richmond Park or Hampstead Heath?'

'I propose that we shall run down to the sea.'

'Very good, my dear: it will, however, be rather fatiguing. It has always struck me that those six hours at the seaside for three shillings——'

'Six hours!' interrupted Miss Dart, with a haughty wave of her hand. 'That is the allowance of the excursionists: of people without cash in their pockets. I intend to go for a week, at least.'

'But will not that be very expensive? At this time of year, to be sure, lodgings are cheap.'

'I mean to go to an hotel.'

'An hotel! Goodness gracious! why, we shall be ruined. I quite think you ought to have a holiday, my dear; and I need not say what intense pleasure it will give me to accompany you. You have been working like a horse, I know, for the last three months; and you ought to be as comfortable and free from sordid cares as possible; but if you will leave all the housekeeping and marketing to me——'

'You will get as little of a holiday at the sea as you get in London,' put in Lizzie, authoritatively. 'What I am bent on is not only comfort, but luxury. I intend to be extravagant—lavish!'

'Mercy me, the girl's mad! That hundred pounds of yours—though, I must say, it was very handsome of Mr. Argand to give it; it's what I call coining money—burns in your pocket. No, my dear. When your uncle and I were married we went to an hotel for ten days. One ought to have been happy, of course, being on one's honeymoon; but one wasn't. Every bit I put into my mouth went, so to speak, against my stomach. It seemed like eating gold; a cup of tea was ninepence. If they brought you a sandwich and a glass of water on a tray, they charged you for plate, glass, and linen. Nobody ought ever to put his head into an hotel that isn't made of money.'

'But if you are—why, then it does not matter,' returned Lizzie, gravely. 'Look at that—and that—and that,' and with every 'that' the speaker produced from a pocket-book a new bank-note for a hundred pounds.

'Heaven have mercy upon us!' gasped Mrs. Richter.

'Say, rather, for what we have received let it make us thankful,' returned Lizzie, smiling.

'And do you mean to say, you have made all those yourself, you amazing creature?'

'I made them, but I didn't forge them, as you think: they are all honestly come by, I do assure you. By the eleven o'clock express this morning we are going down to Casterton, where we shall put up at the Welcome. For the first time for many years, my dear Aunt Jane, you are about to enjoy yourself. If ever I catch you talking—nay, thinking—about what anything costs—mind this—I'll throw a five-pound note into the fire.'

Nothing in the way of wonderment out of a fairy story was ever seen like the expression of Aunt Jane's face. The whole situation, in her eyes, was nothing less than magical. It never even struck her to inquire where all that enormous wealth (as it seemed to her) in bank-notes had come from. Her niece's masterful air and complete confidence in her own resources would of themselves have effected much; but, backed as they were by such material evidences of prosperity, they crushed curiosity itself. Like a child at a pantomime, dazed by the glare of the transformation scene, she did not seek to know how such splendours were produced, but was content to wonder and admire. She left the room to make her simple preparations for the trip, in a sort of splendid stupor, such as is said to be induced by haschish. As for Elizabeth Dart, she had never been so in love with life as at that moment. There is no happiness in the world equal to making happy those we love. To set some good soul, long buffeted by the waves of adversity, above their reach, is an action in the power of comparatively few of us; and not one in ten of those few have the wish to do it. This enormous pleasure, however, had fallen to this young woman's lot. The years of self-sacrifice that her aunt had devoted to her without a murmur, the thousand acts of priceless love she had done for her, were all remembered; and the thought that the time had come at last—not to repay her, for that was impossible—but to show how sensible she was of them, filled her soul with joy. Never again, please God, should sordid care or apprehension for the future—a future not her own—vex that gentle heart! The very winds of heaven should never visit that cheek, furrowed by widow's tears and worn with loneliness and poverty, too roughly. One thing only troubled her, and made her almost ashamed of her happiness—the thought of Mary Melburn, poor and motherless, whom she was about to visit; but it was possible she might make the rough path of life smoother to her also, if the rays of that prosperity which had begun to dawn upon her should grow to the full light of noon. She was not ambitious, but she was very sanguine about her future; and, indeed, not without reason. It was very unphilosophic, no doubt, to be thus elated by a wave or two of the wand of Good Fortune; but then, Lizzie made no claim to philosophy—she was a very intelligent and practical young woman.

She had something even now in her mind of a very prac-

tical character, notwithstanding that it was so full of joy and love. It mingled with the pleasure with which she watched Aunt Jane's delight upon the journey and enhanced it. 'How green the trees are, how blue the sky is : just as they used to be in Devonshire !' said the simple creature.

'You ought to live in the country all your days,' said Lizzie.

Aunt Jane uttered a little sigh, and shook her head.

'We can't have everything we wish in this world, my darling ; let us be grateful for the blessings we do have. Did ever such a day as this come out of the heavens before ?'

'You don't know what comes out of the heavens,' said Lizzie, gently. 'How long is it since you have been ten miles from London ?'

'Ten years. How deliciously fresh the air is !'

'It is nothing to what it will be by the sea. But it will be very quiet down at Casterton. You must not expect to be dining out and going to the opera, as you do in London, you dear old dissipated thing.'

'The idea of my wanting to do anything of the kind !' exclaimed Mrs. Richter, indignantly ; 'why, for my part——' Then she stopped, but not in time.

'Do you suppose I don't know, Aunt Jane, that you do such things for my sake, and for my sake only ?'

'I didn't mean that, my dear,' said Aunt Jane, penitently. 'I'm sure I am very glad to go with you anywhere ; only, if people did but know who you were, I should enjoy it so much better. I have sometimes thought to myself, when they have been talking about those wonderful writings of yours, now, if I could only be allowed to say, "It was Lizzie Dart who wrote those things, and I'm her aunt ;" that would be the happiest moment of my life.'

'You *dear* !' said Lizzie. She felt by intuition that the light of fame is never so welcome as when we see it reflected in the eyes of those who love us.

'I suppose some of your friends will be at the station ?' observed Aunt Jane, timidly, as they drew near to their destination.

'Certainly not ; they have not the least idea that we are coming.'

Mrs. Richter's face wore a look of relief. 'Then we shall have this evening all to ourselves, shall we ?'

'Well, I think, as the inn is rather close to them' (it was

about four doors from the Look-out), 'we must just drop in to see them. But I promise you this, my dear, that if you don't like them we will see as little of them as possible.'

'I am sure I shall like them, because they love you,' returned Aunt Jane, placidly. She was speaking the simple truth—a jewel that not all the gold of the Indies can purchase. What would many a rich man give, I wonder, if he could only hear a fellow-creature utter such words, and believe them? Not only to have lovers for our own sake, but to win their goodwill for others because they love us, is a feat beyond the reach of wealth, or power, or fame.

'How fortunate we were in having that charming carriage, Lizzie, all to ourselves!' observed Aunt Jane, as they waited for their luggage on the platform. 'And what a delightful guard; is it possible, I heard him say "Thank you," Lizzie, as we got out?'

'Very likely; they are certainly civil on this line,' replied Lizzie, with gravity. 'I am glad you enjoyed the journey.'

'I did, indeed, except for the thought of what it must have cost you. The idea of bringing me first-class!'

'I shall have to order a fire to be lighted at the inn, to put that five-pound note in, Aunt Jane, if you say another word.'

'Well, well, I won't. But must we really take a fly—is there no omnibus?'

'I have a good mind to wait here till a carriage-and-four can be procured,' was the menacing rejoinder.

'Why, the very porter touches his hat to us, Lizzie. I never experienced such civility—never! Oh, what air! Oh, what a view! I never saw such a singular-looking hill in all my life.'

'That is Battle Hill, of which I have told you so much. See how it towers above the marsh! What a place it would be to build a house upon, would it not? Do you see a black speck moving along the top of it?—that is Mr. Leyden.'

'My dear child, how can you possibly know that?'

'Because I know his ways.'

'One would think that you had lived with these good folks all your life,' remarked Aunt Jane, with just the least touch of annoyance in her tone.

'And so, indeed, it seems,' answered Lizzie, simply; not forgetting, however, at the same time to lay an assuring hand upon her companion's arm. 'There are people with whom

we may live under the same roof for years and never know ; while there are others whose hearts are opened to us in a few hours.'

'But you must have the key,' observed Mrs. Richter, with unaccustomed shrewdness.

'No doubt. I do not speak, of course, of those who wear their hearts upon their sleeves. There must be sympathy.'

'But even in that, one is sometimes mistaken.'

'True.' It was only a monosyllable, but it was as conclusive as the most laboured discourse. Poor Mrs. Richter felt like one who, going through some great mansion with her host, opens, through inadvertence, some Blue Beard's Chamber. She hastened to change the subject.

'How numerous are the churches yonder, in that great plain ! The folk about here ought to be very good.'

'Still I should prefer not to live upon the marsh. In midsummer there is no shade to be found there save what is cast by Battle Hill. It always used to remind me of that line in the Bible, "The shadow of a great rock in a weary land." When we build our house here, it shall look the other way—not towards the marsh, but the town. Did you ever see such a quaint old place ?'

'Never, never : it is peace and rest itself,' murmured the little lady, in a rapture.

Her aunt's enthusiasm delighted Lizzie ; and, indeed, there are few things more pleasant than introducing those dear to us to scenes we love : moreover, seldom is it that, on revisiting a spot, we can say, 'I am happier than the last time I saw it,' for even if we have no sense of loss, at all events we are older, and our spirits less buoyant than of yore. But in Lizzie's case the comparison of past and present was altogether in favour of the latter. Her new-born prosperity was as marvellous to her, and almost as inexplicable, as it was to her companion.

Their destination was, of course, the Welcome Inn, where it will be remembered Major Melburn had been on the point of having a 'difficulty' with Mr. Winthrop. Their apartments comprehended the very room where the discussion between the two worthies had taken place. Its old-fashioned look, which seemed to promise moderate charges, pleased Mrs. Richter, while the view from the bedroom, which commanded the same prospect as that from the Look-out, charmed her beyond comparison.

‘Do you like this?’ inquired Lizzie, as the other sat enraptured at the window, drinking in the glorious breeze. ‘Do you think you shall be happy here?’

‘Yes, oh yes; except for the thought of having to go away again.’

‘I was afraid it would make you rather dissatisfied with the Marylebone Road,’ said Lizzie, gently.

‘Nay, my dear; that would be wrong, indeed. We should be content with what we have; but this change is delightful.’

‘Perhaps, if one lived here one would get tired of it.’

‘I can’t say that, my dear: it would seem like blasphemy. Never, never, never have I seen anything half as beautiful.’

Lizzie bent down with a smile of serene content, and kissed her aunt upon the forehead.

After luncheon they repaired to the Look-out. Aunt Jane had endeavoured to persuade her niece to see her friends at first alone; but Lizzie was resolute that they should go together. She wished it to be understood how entirely they two were one, and also, by the reception which she knew she would meet with, that her aunt might be assured of the genuineness of the attachment of her friends at Casterton. Nor in this was she disappointed: even the little maid welcomed her with a cry of rapture.

‘Lor, Miss Dart; how pleased Missus will be to see you!’

When her name was announced in the sitting-room, Mrs. Meyrick started from her chair, and held out both her arms in welcome. ‘You dear, *dear* girl!’ she exclaimed. ‘This is Aunt Jane, of course,’ she added, shaking her heartily by the hand. ‘What good fairy has brought you down to us? And why did you not give us a word of warning, Lizzie? Not that that signifies, of course; for I know you will not mind sharing Mary’s room, and Mrs. Richter will, of course, have yours.’

‘We are staying at the inn, my dear Mrs. Meyrick, thank you; but you will see quite enough of us, I promise you.’

‘Enough of you? There, don’t you talk to me like that, Lizzie. Life in London has already taught you to tell fibs. I shall send for your boxes instantly.’

Shy little Mrs. Richter quaked in her shoes lest her niece should succumb to the proposal. Modest as was her estimate of herself, she could have no doubt of her hostess’s goodwill towards her; but half the pleasure of her holiday would have

been taken away had she been expected to spend it in a strange house, and, as she expressed it, 'on her best behaviour.' But Miss Dart stuck to her guns, and was not to be dislodged from the position she had taken up, and for the choice of which she had her reasons.

'And how is dear Mary?'

'I think as well as can be expected; it is, I am thankful to feel, a comfort to her to be here.'

'I am sure of that. And Matthew?'

'He is no better'—the tears came into the widow's eyes. 'I only hope you will think he is no worse. He does not complain; but he moves about less and less. I tell him it is bad for Mary—for he can scarcely ever be induced to be without her—and he does make what effort he can. But—' here Mrs. Meyrick broke off, or, rather, broke down; there was no need, indeed, for her to finish, for she was speaking to sympathetic ears. 'I am sure the sight of you, Lizzie, will do him as much good as anything,' she added, after a painful pause.

'Is he in the pavilion?'

'Yes; he lives there, just as usual; only, alas! keeps more to the sofa. You will find Mary reading to him, and talking over his new book.'

'His new book? I did not know he was bringing out a book.'

'He has kept it a secret even from me. The first copies came this morning, and he was going to send you one of them by to-night's post. It will be ten times the pleasure to him to give it to you himself—but there, I must not tell you another word about it. You had better go to him at once, or he will have a grievance against me for detaining you.'

'How good and kind you are to my Lizzie, Mrs. Meyrick!' said Aunt Jane, in a trembling tone, when the two elder ladies were left alone.

'Nay, it is she who is good to us, my dear Mrs. Richter. We call her our Sunbeam. Hark at them! They have seen her from the window. That is Mary's voice, and that—that sound you hear—is my poor son, hastening on his crutches to meet her. He knew she had not forgotten us, though she did strive to keep her secret. Oh! my dear Mrs. Richter, how proud you must be of her; how happy her success must make you!'

'It does, of course; but she has no secret that I know of.'

‘What! do you mean to say that you don’t know about it?’

‘I know there is something,’ said Mrs. Richter, calling to mind the vision of wealth that had so dazzled her that morning; ‘but dear Lizzie, though she is kinder and more loving than ever—if that is possible—has grown beyond me altogether.’

‘That is what Matthew says: she stands a head and shoulders above everybody. Though she never told us, Matthew has found her out.’

‘But what is the secret?’ exclaimed Mrs. Richter, excitedly.

‘If you don’t know it, I mustn’t tell you, Mrs. Richter. You must have it from her lips, and not from mine. But I am sure it’s true. Matthew has said so; and Matthew is so clever. Here they all come together. See, he is moving along quite fast—just as he used to do long ago; it’s like a miracle; and your Lizzie, who is also our Lizzie, has worked it. She is, as he says, the most wonderful girl that ever lived!’

CHAPTER XL.

THE SECRET.

IN some book that Mrs. Richter had read in her childhood—full of woodcuts and allegories—there was a picture of Sorrow and Ill-Health being comforted by Wisdom; which, as the three young folks came into view, Mary, in her robe of mourning, and Matthew Meyrick, pale and crippled, with Elizabeth Dart serene and smiling between them, recurred to her with a flash. The confidence they reposed in her, the belief they had in her powers, was as clearly to be read in the expression of their faces as the affection with which they regarded her. She had been received by them with rapture, though Mary had shed those natural tears, in response to her friend’s sympathetic embrace, which rush to our eyes with every association with those whom we have lately lost. It seemed to both of them that they could have talked to her for hours, and never wearied tongue or ear; but the information that she had brought Aunt Jane with her had caused them to postpone their confidences. To make one so dear to their

visitor to feel that she was at home with all at the Look-out was their first thought. Never since 'dear Ernest's' time, nor possibly even then—for he had been more given to theology than sentiment—had little Mrs. Richter been made so much of. 'I really almost began to think, my dear,' she said afterwards to Lizzie, 'that I must have done something, either in a dream or in some other state of existence, to deserve it.'

Though they spoke of persons she had never seen—Mrs. Melburn and the Squire—she had heard so much of them from her niece that she had not that feeling of isolation and sense of 'being out of it' that is generally experienced under similar circumstances; while, at the same time, it gratified her to be thus treated as one of the family. Nervous as she always was in the presence of mere acquaintances, it did not even alarm her very much when a wrinkled little man suddenly appeared in the centre of the group, and, after wringing Lizzie's hand as though he would wring it off, proceeded to shake her own as heartily.

'Of course, you are Aunt Jane,' he said, 'who, having repented of taking this young lady from her natural home, has brought her back to us and to what used to be Casterton.'

'The dear old place, however, looks very much as it used to do,' said Lizzie, laughing.

'It won't do that for long, my dear,' sighed the old gentleman; 'we are going to be as spick and span as Clapton-on-Sea, or any other fashionable town that flames out of an advertisement. We shall have an esplanade, with a brass band playing on it from two to four, before we are many months older. His lordship will stick at nothing. The sacrilegious wretch has actually offered Battle Hill for sale, with a hideous suggestion about its being adapted for building purposes.'

'But nobody has bought it, nor even bid for it; has he?'

'Not as yet; but it is only a question of time. They will buy it, and they will build villa residences upon it. What do they care for the relics of the dead and the memorials of their forefathers?'

'What if in digging the foundations of the villas they should come upon the buried treasure?' observed Lizzie, slily.

'Don't speak of it!' exclaimed the old man, vehemently. 'If such an event should happen, it would be the death of me; and, I tell you, it *may* happen. The idea of a specu-

lative builder becoming possessed of the spoil of the Dane has something blasphemous about it. Every time I go to that hill, I seem to feel it will be my last visit. There is a board up already, with "Trespassers Beware!" upon it; but that I take no notice of. I suppose it, in my own mind, to refer to any wretches who may want to build there. Think of Urfa Terrace or Canute Crescent, and Sweyn Villas, defiling that grand old hill! But any one who chooses to go into John Martin's, yonder, with 500*l.* in his pocket, can begin that infamous work to-morrow; and nobody can stop him. However, I have no right to talk about a misfortune which affects no one, after all, but a poor antiquary like myself. Let us speak of a much pleasanter subject—your own affairs. We poor savages at Casterton always ventured, you know, to think you were a marvel; and that the idol of our barbarous little tribe should have become an object of worship in the world of London is immensely to the credit of our discernment.'

'It would be, without doubt, if the circumstance you mention had taken place,' replied Lizzie, laughing. 'Unhappily, however, there have been no offerings at the shrine.'

'There has been incense enough, at all events,' put in Matthew. 'I never open a newspaper, my dear Miss Dart, without reading something eulogistic about you. Instead of laying siege to Fame in the usual fashion by approaches and parallels, you seem to have carried her by a *coup de main*.'

'They must be very old newspapers, I fear, in which you read anything about my poor production,' said Lizzie. 'It is quite true, indeed, that what I have contributed to the "Millennium" has been praised, much beyond my expectations and their worth; but even three swallows don't make a summer.'

'My dear Mat,' murmured Mary, despondingly, 'I am afraid you must have made a mistake.'

'Not a bit of it,' he answered, under his breath. 'Don't you know a hypocrite when you see one? Look at that wicked blush.'

There was certainly a flush in Elizabeth Dart's cheek which might have been taken in an accused person, by a hostile judge, as an evidence of guilt.

'You are more in the dark, Miss Dart, than we are,' observed Roger Leyden, gravely. 'Would you mind coming into the light here, and letting me have a good long look at your face? It will be a great pleasure to me, even if I don't find in it what I expect to see.'

'You have already told my fortune, sir, by starlight,' she answered, lightly, 'so there is no excuse for further investigation.'

'Very good. Then we will tell Mrs. Richter's fortune for her.' He spoke so gently, and with such a tender respect in his tone, that Aunt Jane was not one whit alarmed by this alarming proposition.

'There are plenty of lines to guide you,' she answered, smiling, 'but I am afraid they lead to nothing; or at least to a very poor fortune.'

'I am not sure of that,' said the antiquary, in solemn tones, and scrutinising her attentively: 'you are, to begin with, very happy in your domestic relations, and people get fond of you at first sight.'

'He is right, so far,' cried Matthew, clapping his hands.

'He is judging by results,' objected Mary.

'My dear Lizzie, how can you permit your aunt to be teased in this way!' said Mrs. Meyrick.

'Be quiet, all of you; you are interrupting the investigation,' exclaimed Mr. Leyden, authoritatively. 'If you are not famous yourself, my dear lady, you will become so by proxy. I am not quite sure which it will be; but you have much literary taste.'

'There I am sure you are wrong,' said Aunt Jane, laughing; 'ask Lizzie.'

'I shall not "ask Lizzie," as Lizzie is not to be trusted. Lizzie will say anything, or decline to say anything. How do you know you have no literary taste? Don't you like the novel, "The Usher," that has just been begun in the Millennium'?

'I have not read it; I never read anything in the "Millennium" except what Lizzie writes,' answered Mrs. Richter, simply.

There was an uncomfortable silence. 'Is it possible that the intelligence of this honourable court has been deceived?' inquired Roger Leyden, 'or is this witness mute of malice?'

'I have not the least idea what you are wanting to get out of me,' said Mrs. Richter, raising her eyebrows.

'She must be pressed to death,' said Roger Leyden, gravely. 'I don't see any other way out of it.'

'She is telling nothing but the truth, Roger,' observed Matthew, confidently: 'the principal criminal has, it seems, no confederate.'

‘Do you mean to say, my dear Mrs. Richter,’ exclaimed Mr. Leyden, impatiently, ‘that you have no secret to tell us in connection with the accused?’

‘If you mean with Lizzie, none at all: nothing has been confided to me, I do assure you.’

‘You have not chanced to hear that she is bringing out a book at all, perhaps?’ continued the inquisitor, severely.

‘Not a word.’

Roger Leyden glanced with a puzzled air at Matthew; his look seemed to say, ‘Perhaps we are wrong after all.’ Matthew shook his head, and smiled incredulously.

‘What is all this about?’ inquired Miss Dart, innocently. While these searching interrogations were being put to Aunt Jane she had been to all appearance engaged in private conversation with Mrs. Meyrick. ‘Did I hear that any one had been bringing out a book?’ Matthew moved to a side table and took from it a little parcel made up for the book-post, and addressed to herself. ‘Your arrival, my dear Miss Dart,’ he said, placing it in her hands, ‘has saved me sixpence.’

‘This is charming, indeed!’ she exclaimed, delightedly. ‘What a pleasant surprise, indeed, I have anticipated! “Poems by Matthew Meyrick”—how very nice that looks! Here are “The Children,” “The Harpsichord,” and all my old favourites. I know them all by heart, but I no less rejoice to hold them in my hand. They are published, I see, by Mr. Rose, of Paternoster Row. I happen to know that gentleman, and shall congratulate him on his discernment. I congratulate you, my dear Matthew, with all my heart. I will not say, in timeworn phrase, that the casket is worthy of the jewel; but the binding—though, I am afraid, all the bindings are not like this—is perfection.’

‘Come, that was *my* choice!’ exclaimed Mrs. Meyrick, triumphantly. ‘I was determined to have a hand in dear Matthew’s book, if it was only in the cover.’

Suddenly, Miss Dart, who was still turning over the leaves of the little volume, became crimson. ‘She has seen it at last,’ murmured Mary.

‘You are right, Mat,’ observed Roger Leyden, sententially; ‘if ever conscious guilt was depicted in the human countenance, I behold it now. If your modesty forbids your reading that dedication aloud, Miss Dart, I will repeat it for you. “*To the Authoress of ‘The Usher,’ whose genius I admire, like the rest of the world; and whose friendship I*

should envy above all things, did I not enjoy the advantage of possessing it."

'I call that almost as pretty as the poem,' observed Mrs. Meyrick, critically. Miss Dart had not yet spoken, but it was plain she was greatly agitated; the little book trembled in her grasp.

It troubled her in many ways to know that her secret was revealed; but it touched her to learn that Matthew had discovered what so many had failed to find; it was his affection for her, no doubt, that had made his eyes so keen.

'Whatever good fortune may befall me,' she said, earnestly, 'even though it should be deserved, I shall never value so highly as this unmerited proof of your regard for me, Matthew.'

'Now what does she mean by unmerited?' put in the antiquary, sharply. 'Is she still endeavouring to put us off the scent?'

'I meant the praise,' she answered, gently. 'I confess, I did write the book.'

Roger Leyden seized his cap and threw it up to the ceiling; Mrs. Meyrick and Mary clapped their hands; and Matthew beat the floor in an ecstasy of applause. Aunt Jane alone made no demonstration: her lips trembled, and tears came into her eyes. While rejoicing in her niece's success, her tender heart felt a thrill of pain that she had not been made the repository of a secret, to the knowledge of which others had doubtless been admitted. Miss Dart read all she felt at a single glance. 'If I had told anybody about it,' she said, 'of course it would have been you, Aunt Jane; but I thought it better, in case of failure, to keep the matter to myself alone. How was it, Matthew, that you ever came to guess it?'

'I recognised your hand throughout, Lizzie, as Mary will bear me witness; but there were some touches which could have come from no other pen: the poor old clerk, about whom there was every "symptom of 'breaking up,' except the holidays;" the priest, who knows no more of spiritual matters than an organ monkey knows of music; and your literary gentleman, who offers to take charge of the child in the crowd at the illuminations, on the ground that he is accustomed "to see things through the press," spoke to me unmistakably of Elizabeth Dart. There were some things, indeed, that puzzled me; but their very unlikeness to yourself

somehow awoke my suspicions: the moralising old General, for example, who remarks "that men of middle age, who omit to play whist in the afternoons, generally get into mischief." Now where on earth did you get that from ?

Lizzie shrugged her shoulders, and laughed with an indifferent air; but in reality she resented the question: no novelist likes to be asked whence he took this and that. In this particular case, too, it so happened that Miss Dart had borrowed the observation from the cynical lips of Jefferson Melburn.

'There were some things, however, that localised you,' continued Matthew, 'and put the matter beyond doubt. Don't you recollect how amused you were with the old sexton here, and his technical expressions? Now, there is a verger in your story who uses his very phrase—"When we depart this transeptory life."'

'To be sure,' said Miss Dart. 'I recollect it perfectly. How very, very foolish of me! To rob without concealment is the height of imprudence.' She spoke with an air of vexation, but in her heart she was well pleased: it was that 'transeptory life,' she felt convinced, which had, in fact, betrayed her. All the other things were but corroborations; mere affection had not been that touchstone which she had thought and feared. If it *had* been, some one other than Matthew Meyrick, and a better critic, would surely, surely, have made as good a guess as he.

CHAPTER XLI.

A DEAL.

BEFORE Lizzie left the Look-out that evening—for it is needless to say that Aunt Jane and she were constrained to remain to dinner—she found the opportunity of having a private talk with Mary. She learnt that, though the Squire was still at Burrow Hall, his position was greatly altered; he had lost large sums in speculation; and the property was much involved. It had been obviously a relief to him when Mrs. Meyrick had proposed to take charge of his daughter. 'I offered to stay with poor papa,' said Mary, 'but he did not want me. He said he wanted nobody. It will be very

wretched for him. Jefferson and he have had some disagreement about the entail. He will come down, I believe, in the shooting season, and then papa will go elsewhere. It is a miserable story.'

'And as to your own affairs, darling?' inquired Miss Dart.

'They can scarcely be called affairs,' she answered, smiling, 'they are so insignificant. I have a thousand pounds from dear mamma, the interest of which at present forms my pin-money. Whether I shall ever have anything more to live upon is doubtful. In the meantime, however, papa pays a certain sum for my maintenance to aunt. You must not blame him; he does as much as he can for me. Things do not look very bright, but they might have been much worse.'

Miss Dart knew what she meant—namely, that she might have been still suffering from the persecution of Mr. Winthrop, which had now ceased. She had always sympathised with Mary upon that matter; but much more since she herself had learned how hateful to a woman's mind it was possible for a man to be. It was a subject much too unwelcome to be pursued.

'And Matthew!'

Mary's face, which had hitherto been serene and cheerful, became troubled at once.

'Matthew is no better. Oh! Lizzie, I fear, I fear, that he is getting worse. You see him now at his very best, because your coming has gladdened him. But sometimes—never before his mother, but only when we two are quite alone—it is very sad to hear him talk. It is not as if he did not wish to get well; he does wish it very much, poor fellow—but——'

'That is so far in his favour,' put in Lizzie, quickly. 'It is only the incurable who has neither wish nor hope. His very desire for life will help him to hold on to it.'

Mary shook her head. 'No, no; he feels it slipping from him, and that his grasp of it weakens almost daily. What will his mother do when he is gone?'

'And what will *you* do?' thought Lizzie to herself, as she gazed on her companion's face, which, shadowed by the coming woe, had suddenly lost its look of youth, and become grey and haggard. 'Mary, dear, I have got a plan for Matthew. He must come up to town and see Dr. Dredge.'

'Who is Dr. Dredge?'

'He is a physician who has made spinal complaint his peculiar study. When I tell you that Dr. Dalling once spoke to me about him, at Burrow Hall, as being the only man living likely to do Matthew good, you may be sure that he has some special gift. Your cousin, remember, has seen no one but a country doctor, in whom, moreover, he has himself but little confidence.'

'He has confidence in no one. He is convinced that no skill can possibly do him good; while as to going up to town, the thought of the expense such a proceeding would entail would, I am sure, prevent him doing any such thing, even if he were more hopeful. "There has been enough money wasted upon me already by my poor mother," he says.'

'The cost is of no consequence. I have more money than I want, and nothing would please me so much as the spending of it to do Matthew good. One of the things—indeed, the main thing—I have come down here about is to obtain, through you, his consent to try Dr. Dredge. I would have brought him down to see Matthew here, but that Mr. Argand tells me he will never leave town to visit anybody.'

'You good, dear girl!' cried Mary, embracing her friend affectionately. 'I will tell Matthew what you offer, because it will please him so, but I warn you beforehand that he will not consent. "What?" he will say, "do you think I would take Lizzie's money, which she has earned with her brain, any more than my dear mother's, and throw it into the gutter?"'

'But it may not be thrown into the gutter. It may bring health and strength, and, at all events, there is a chance of it. My plan is this—that Matthew and you, and Mrs. Meyrick, shall have our rooms, where we know that we can make you comfortable; while Aunt Jane and I emigrate to the next floor.'

'That is, we are to evict as well as ruin you. Why, it would cost a fortune.'

'It would cost, perhaps, fifty pounds—perhaps a hundred. Let me tell you, Miss, I am now become a person of property, and that a hundred pounds would neither make me nor break me. You will not go into these details with Matthew, of course; but I entreat of you to persuade him.'

'I will do my best, though I know that I shall fail. I shall be your debtor for what you would have done as long as I live.'

'I shall leave you two alone to-morrow morning,' said Lizzie, 'to discuss the matter; and I dare say Mrs. Meyrick will kindly take Aunt Jane off my hands till luncheon time, as I have a little business to transact upon my own account.'

'Not work, dear Lizzie; I do hope you will take a complete holiday while you are down here. Mrs. Richter tells me that your pen is never out of your hand at home.'

'I promise you it is nothing to tax my brain,' said Lizzie, laughing; and here Roger Leyden came up and pointed to the clock, which stood at a very late hour indeed, as hours were reckoned at Casterton. 'You will never keep your appointment with me on the Hill to-morrow, Miss Dart, if you don't get some beauty sleep.'

'Oh, *that's* the business you have to transact which will not tax your brain, is it?' whispered Mary, roguishly. Lizzie nodded assent. 'To make an assignation with a young lady, Mr. Leyden, and then to talk about it, is not what is done in the best circles,' she observed, reproachfully.

Nevertheless, Mr. Leyden was permitted to escort the two ladies home to the inn.

'At eleven, then, punctually?' said Lizzie, as he took his leave.

'Why not at ten?'

'Because between ten and eleven I have something particular to do.'

'I never heard of anybody having anything particular to do in Casterton before,' grumbled the antiquary; 'but you always have your way. At eleven, then, let it be.'

Aunt Jane and Lizzie breakfasted early the next morning—earlier, indeed, than the latter desired, for her own purposes; but it was impossible to restrain the elder lady's energy. 'Every moment that I spend indoors,' she said, 'I grudge. I want to drink in as much of this glorious air, to see as much of this lovely spot, as possible. It is not to be expected that I shall have such a holiday again. It seems to me that the whole scene will melt if once I take my eyes off it.'

'Then you would really like to live here?'

'Don't, Lizzie, don't; it is cruel. The very notion of leaving it, as we must do to-morrow, I suppose, or the next day, appals me. Don't let me know when I am going till it is time to pack up. In the meantime, I am living here.'

'Quite right; "life is but thought,"' said Lizzie, smiling

at her tenderly. 'For the present, consider yourself a resident. Would you think it very unkind of me if I left you to your own devices for an hour or two this morning, though Mrs. Meyrick, you know, said she expected you after breakfast?'

'She is very good, and they are all as good to me as good can be; but I should like a little walk by the sea alone above all things. Somehow or other, Lizzie—I suppose it's the vastness and freedom of it—I always feel a better woman at the sea.'

'Then what a good woman you would be if you lived here!'

'Don't, Lizzie; don't, I say. I am no more fit for it than to live in Heaven. Look at that sea-gull! Not all the pigeons in the Marylebone Road can compare with it.'

'If you go to the jetty—it's the first turning to the right—you'll see plenty of them. If I don't join you there, you'll find me at the Look-out.'

Aunt Jane trotted off in the direction indicated, like a child on a holiday. She had no doubt that Lizzie had some of that wonderfully literary work to do, which, considering the praise it brought, not to mention that sheaf of bank-notes which had dazzled her eyes the previous morning, seemed to her to have something of magic about it. Even that great work 'The Life of Apollinaris' sank into insignificance beside it. She did not even dare to advise her niece not to work, as Mary had done, though she longed to do so. Lizzie knew what was good for her, and for everybody, so much better than she did. How everybody who knew what she had done bowed down before her; never was there, surely, such a wonderful young woman. Dear Ernest had always said that it was much better to be good than clever (a remark which he had not the least idea was of an egotistic character); but Lizzie was as good, if that was possible, as she was clever.

Almost opposite the inn was the office of Mr. Snugg, the auctioneer and estate agent. As there was nothing to sell to anybody at Casterton, and no estate except Lord Destray's, even this double-barrelled business could not have brought him in much profit, but he was also a carpenter and builder. He had a front shop dedicated to the two humbler trades, where turning and planing were carried on, and a back parlour, hung with maps and plans, devoted to the agency.

In the latter apartment he was rarely to be found, not only

because there was little to do there, but because it had only a bit of a skylight, and afforded no view save of the heavenly bodies. He liked to behold his fellow-creatures, and to mitigate the asperities of toil by conversation with the passers-by. A half-door, which communicated with the street, facilitated this; and any summer day Mr. Snugg was to be seen, leaning on the lower half, and looking up the street and down the street—if not for a customer, at least for a companion. We hear people talk of the Mysteries of London Life, as regards the existence of a considerable portion of its inhabitants; and how on earth its poor women keep body and soul together is indeed difficult to understand; but how small shopkeepers continue to live and thrive in the country is, to my mind, much more amazing. The only explanation of the phenomenon is that they have all a few thousands in the Three per Cents., and that their affectation of carrying on business is merely a philanthropic pretence; so that the youthful beholder of their unparalleled prosperity may set it down to the magic of Perseverance.

Mr. Snugg's carpenter and builder's business opened early, but his auction and estate agency was not in working order till ten A.M. To the former he attended in his shirt sleeves, and edified the gossips by his Radical views; but when concerning himself with the latter, he was no longer Snugg the joiner, but an individual of great respectability, with a stake in the country, and opinions appropriate to that elevated position.

When Miss Dart issued from the Welcome that morning, Mr. Snugg was in his chrysalis state, and rather less 'within his gates' than without them; his three-quarter length was stretched over the half-door, where the disappearance of Mrs. Richter round the corner had left it.

The spectacle of a stranger in Casterton was calculated to arouse excitement in the mind of any native; and Mr. Snugg, in addition to his multifarious callings, was the most inveterate of gossips. But for this preoccupation of his mind, the presence of Miss Dart at his elbow would certainly not have escaped him.

'A fine morning, Mr. Snugg.'

'Why, Miss Dart, I do declare! Glad to see you back at Casterton.'

'Thank you, Mr. Snugg. Yes; I have come down with my aunt from London for a few days.'

'The strange lady just gone to the jetty, I suppose; I was wondering who she was. Strangers here are a godsend—

though old friends are much more so, I'm sure,' here he bowed politely; 'nothing new here, but New Year's day, from one year's end to another.'

'You are contemplating something new, at all events—if, as I hear, old Battle Hill is to be sold.'

'The Loomp? True; but who'll buy it?' replied Mr. Snugg, despondently. 'It's only a bit of unproductive land, with a few fir-trees on it, you see—like a poor peer with his coronet. It's cheap enough, 'tis true, but then if nobody wants it——'

'I think I know of some one who would like to have it, if it is really, as you say, to be sold cheap.'

'You do?' he snatched off the carpenter's cap which he wore at work, and threw back the half-door. 'If you will be kind enough to step into the office, Miss Dart, I will be with you in a minute, and furnish you with all particulars.'

It was really not much more than a minute before he reappeared, no longer as Snugg the joiner, but in his auctioneer-and-estate-agent apparel.

'The Hill has already been put up for sale, I believe,' observed Miss Dart.

'Well, yes; the reserved price of 500*l.* was not realised. As I explained to his lordship, sufficiently long notice had not been given, nor was the matter advertised as it should be. We shall be more fortunate next time, no doubt.'

'But in the meanwhile, as I read in the newspaper, 500*l.* was the price.'

'That is so—to a certain extent: to builders who wanted a site, in consideration of the advantages that would arrive to the estate, there might be——'

'My friend is not a builder.'

'As I concluded. A man of taste, fond of the picturesque, perhaps, and of antiquities? To such a person the situation for a villa residence would be unrivalled. The Hill has been in the Destray family for centuries. That of itself is a recommendation; and the present lord, when a boy, has often picnicked upon it, he told me, with the present members of the family: quite an aristocratic nook. The western slope affords good opportunities for a mansion in the Gothic style.'

'My friend would not desire a mansion; his object in possessing the Hill would be to erect upon it a small cottage; but I am afraid the purchase-money, combined with the cost of such a dwelling, would be above his means.'

'A very pretty cottage could be built under the lee of that hill; quite sheltered, and with a splendid view, for, let us say, 400*l*.'

'Would you undertake to build it yourself, Mr. Snugg, for that money?'

'Well, well; I was speaking in general terms—though the materials, to be sure, are close at hand. It was not as if you were asking me for an estimate, Miss Dart.'

'Not exactly, yet the person I have in my mind would, I think, prefer the matter to be in local hands, and you will certainly have my good word, Mr. Snugg. On the other hand, 900*l*. is, I fear, more than he is in a position to give.'

'Just so; that is, of course, a difficulty,' said Mr. Snugg, smoothing his chin as though he were removing the obstacle in question. 'I think, however, I may fairly say to his lordship, "Here is an offer of 450*l*., or even 400*l*., for the Hill; not, indeed, from a professional builder, but from a gentleman of taste, who has given me his word to employ an architect who may be trusted to beautify rather than disfigure the locality." Yes; I think I should be doing his lordship a service, Miss Dart, in persuading him, under the circumstances you have mentioned, to take 400*l*. for Battle Hill.'

'Very good. I have the purchase-money in my possession, and if the matter can be concluded in a day or two, before I leave the town, I shall be obliged to you.'

'I will have a memorandum that will be binding prepared by to-morrow morning, if you will kindly give me the gentleman's name.'

'You may make it out in my name, Mr. Snugg.'

'In your name? Well, now, really, Miss Dart, this is a satisfactory circumstance,' said the agent, rubbing his hands deferentially. 'It is seldom, indeed, that business and pleasure are so mixed. With a lady already so well known in Casterton, and, if I may venture to add, so favourably inclined towards myself, there can be no sort of difficulty about the estimate about the cottage; and, as to the purchase-money for the Hill, you may take it for certain that it will not exceed 400*l*.'

CHAPTER XLII.

CONGRATULATED.

To judge by the talk about the 'hunger for land,' one would suppose that when the earth beneath us is our own property, we tread it with a more assured and vigorous step, while, at the same time, we strike the stars with our head. I had a little land myself once, but experienced no such sensations on the spot in question; and was exceedingly glad to get rid of it. For my part, I can no more conceive of the earth as mine—in the same sense, at least, that the five shillings in my pocket are my own—than of the sea or the sky belonging to me. Similarly, it was with no sense of proprietorship that Miss Dart drew near Battle Hill, though to all intents and purposes she had bought it. That she had secured a house, or rather a spot whereon to build a house, for Aunt Jane and herself in a locality that both delighted in, was, however, a conviction sufficiently pleasurable without any territorial pride; and that that spot was Battle Hill was also a subject of especial congratulation on her friends' account. With what delight would Mrs. Meyrick and Mary and Matthew receive the news that, sooner or later, she would become their neighbour; and with what rapture would Roger Leyden welcome it! She found him looking out for her from the hill top.

'You are better than your word,' he cried, holding out his hand.

'I got my business over more quickly than I expected,' she replied.

'And it was done well, as well as quickly, I'll be bound. You look as if your ideas were still in full flow.'

'I think it was done rather well,' she answered. She was secretly very proud of the bargain she had effected with Mr. Snugg; not only as a personal achievement, but on broader and higher grounds. It was always said of literary persons that they were unfit for practical affairs, and she flattered herself that she had taken that reproach away from their profession by her manipulation of Mr. Snugg that morning.

'This is like old times,' said the antiquary. 'I hardly hoped ever to stand with you on Battle Hill again, with the same feelings.'

'Yet I am not very prone to change,' remarked Miss Dart, quietly.

'That is true. You will be always natural; you will estimate things at their just value; no tumult of acclaim will ever turn your head. I was speaking of the place itself, which will sooner or later undergo terrible alterations.'

'You mean, if it is sold?'

'It is sure to be sold.'

'Yet the reserve price, I understand, was not bidden when the lot was put up for auction.'

'The reserve price? That is Snugg's story. It is quite true that no one bid 500*l.* for the Hill, nor 50*l.* The fact is, nobody wanted it.'

'But would it be sold for less than 500*l.* ?'

'Well, of course it would. To my certain knowledge, it was offered to Bolt, the grazier, for 350*l.*'

'Goodness gracious!' said Miss Dart.

'Fact, I assure you. I had almost a mind to sell all I had in the world and buy it myself, though I know it would be my ruin. If Battle Hill were mine, I *must* dig for the treasure. The temptation is still tremendous. I dream about it; I lie awake and think about it. It might cost ten thousand pounds to find it, you say; but it might also cost only a five-pound note; and if I bought the hill I should have about five pounds to spare. Every time I pass Snugg's shop I feel inclined to go in and buy it, lest somebody else should, like the dog in the manger.'

'But why is it not bought?'

'Because, except for building purposes, it is absolutely useless; and, at present, the builders don't see their way. Of course, they will see it some day; in the meantime, it is possible that some sacrilegious wretch will take a fancy to it, and purchase it for his own pleasure. That would be better, of course, than to see it fall into the hands of the Philistines of the line and plummet; but, still, it would be terrible. He would put up a notice, "This is Private," and gates at the foot of the hill, which would be open to the public on Saturday afternoons only.'

'Such a creature would build a house upon it, I suppose?'

observed Miss Dart.

'Of course he would; the most hideous house conceivable.'

'And where would he put it? or rather, where would you put it, if you were he?'

‘The two suppositions are quite distinct,’ observed the antiquary, drily. ‘*He* would put it where his architect advised him—facing the south and west, so as to suck in the fogs from the marsh and shut out the town. I should put it in yonder coomb, where I could see the old castle and the jetty, and at night the harbour light.’

‘And the pavilion and the Look-out,’ murmured Miss Dart.

‘Of course. But what would the monster we have in our minds care about such things?’

‘Dear Mr. Leyden, I am that monster; I have bought Battle Hill. I mean to build not a house, but a little cottage in that coomb, where I propose to spend my life.’

‘You! *You* have bought it?’ cried the antiquary, solemnly. ‘It is the finger of Fate!’ His eyes wandered over the hill, and then came back to her confident face, with a strange look of care in them.

‘And have you not a word of congratulation to give me? Are you not pleased that I am about to be your neighbour, as I hope to be?’

‘Yes; yes, indeed. I am more glad than words can say; it will bring happiness, too, to other hearts than mine. “For life,” you say; yes, and to your children after you. Some day or other my prophecy will come to pass, and you or yours will find what Urfa buried here.’

‘Well, since it was you who first put it into my mind to buy the hill, I promise you this, Mr. Leyden—that if I do find the treasure you shall have half of it.’

‘You are joking! You cannot be serious! Do you really mean that you will make it over to me or my representatives?’

‘Certainly; I never was more serious in my life,’ she answered, gravely. ‘Unfortunately, I am not so generous as I wish to be thought, because I am incredulous as to the existence of the thing in question. But you shall have a written undertaking—you shall draw it up yourself, and I will sign it—to satisfy you upon the point. On the other hand, I must say at once that I shall not spend sixpence in digging to look for it.’

‘That’s not to be expected,’ assented the antiquary; ‘nor, indeed, would I have you risk anything in such a search. I am not so grasping as I seem, indeed.’

‘You don’t even seem grasping, Mr. Leyden,’ said Miss Dart, smiling.

‘I must, at all events, appear very selfish in having shown no curiosity to know how you have acquired your proud position of landed proprietor. For the moment, the sense of your golden expectations put out of my head the humbler means by which you came into them.’

‘Pray do not say expectations, Mr. Leyden, for I have none.’

‘Well, then, possibilities. You know that it is personal interest, and not impertinence, that prompts the inquiry; but where on earth did you get the money from? The pen nowadays coins gold, I hear, but the “Millennium” does not pay at that rate; and “The Usher” is only just begun.’

‘It is “The Usher,” nevertheless, to which I am indebted for Battle Hill. I have sold the use of the novel for five years for a thousand pounds.’

‘Heavens and Earth! I was an “Usher” myself once, and never made a tenth of the money.’

‘Nevertheless, it’s not a fortune; and I can well imagine that many people will think me very foolish for spending so much of my little all in such a purchase. But dear Aunt Jane and I have had such a bad time of it, and she for so much longer than I, that we two yearn for peace and quiet; also, thanks to you, I have learnt to love Battle Hill very dearly. Moreover, when the cottage is built, we shall live here as cheaply as anywhere. You may say, indeed, it is difficult to live even cheaply, if one has nothing to live upon; but as to the future, I am content to take my chance. At present I am young and in health, and what I have done in the writing way I feel confident I can do again, and perhaps again, and even better.’

‘That is a noble confidence,’ exclaimed the antiquary, admiringly, ‘and, I will be sworn, well founded. But, though I say it to my own disadvantage, you must not bury yourself alive at Casterton. For a poet, it is well enough: he communes with the stars; but you must mix with that world it is your mission (or I am greatly mistaken) to describe.’

‘I feel that,’ answered his companion, simply. ‘It is my purpose, if all goes well, to live here all the summer long; to come whenever I need rest and quiet, and to make this glorious spot my home. But in the winter I shall live in London.’

That is what you would have suggested, is it not? Why do you look so grave?’

‘Did I look grave? I meant to look glad. Such good fortune following on good desert is rare, indeed. It seems to redress the balance—restore the average of happiness.’ His eyes were fixed upon the Look-out.

‘You were thinking of those to whom the cup of life has been dealt in another measure,’ said Miss Dart. ‘I, too, believe me, have not forgotten them.’

‘I am sure you have not. There are some hearts—a very few—that melt beneath the sun of prosperity; that seem to grow more tender to the woes of others the farther they themselves are removed from woe. Let us go down and gladden our dear friends yonder with the news of your good fortune.’

‘I must not tell them till I have bought the Hill; that will not be till to-morrow. There may be a slip between the cup and the lip. Aunt Jane was saying yesterday that Casterton seemed too beautiful, to be real; that she was afraid it would melt before her eyes, and that is what I feel with respect to this darling scheme of mine.’

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE SHADOW IN THE SUNSHINE.

THAT it never rains but it pours, in the sense of sorrows not befalling us singly, is a proverb that few of us poor mortals are found to deny; but there is no similar saw in connection with prosperity. The Greeks of old were absolutely afraid of great good luck—so very rare was it, in their time, that Fortune gave men a lift without a back-hander to follow; and the Scotch have a term for good spirits which itself presages misfortune. Elizabeth Dart was grateful from the bottom of her heart for the good things which had befallen her; but she feared no Nemesis, and had no misgivings. Without for one moment endorsing Roger Leyden’s view of desert in the matter, she was too honest to belie her own talents; and, indeed, regarded them almost as judiciously as though they belonged to some one else; they had been appreciated by the public far beyond her hopes, and been rewarded materially far beyond

her expectations; but, though she had under-estimated the value of what she had produced, she had not under-estimated its merit. She was as free from mock modesty on the one hand as she was from vanity on the other. It was impossible for her to shut her eyes to the fact that, considering the scanty nature of her performances, they had already made a great and unusual success; while the manner in which 'The Usher' had been received was more encouraging still. Nor did she judge from results alone; she had a sense of proportion rare in her sex, and though what she had effected of course fell far short of what she had proposed to herself—for expression can never convey our ideas with the perfection we desire—her work held its own, and more than its own, by comparison with the best specimens of her contemporaries. She recognised, in fact, if she did not actually acknowledge to herself, the true nature of those aspirations which had always dwelt within her; and that circumstance filled her with the best kind of confidence—the consciousness of power. There are some writers, and very good ones, who are the Single-speech Hamiltons of literature; they embody their experience of life in a single book, and then have done with it, from sheer lack of material; they have no deposit in the Bank of Imagination. If they make a second attempt, they overdraw their account. Now, Elizabeth Dart was conscious of possessing resources for much more than one campaign. Exceptional as she was in many ways, she also held peculiar views of life. She desired money only for the happiness which it conferred, though by no means on herself only; indeed, she had discovered early that the greatest happiness is to be found in conferring it; and where most people thought of increase, she thought of enjoyment.

One of the richest men I ever knew—but by no means the worst—came by accident to his death, when he had only made a million or so. The whole energies of his existence had been spent in acquiring wealth, and, long after there had been the least necessity for it, he had worked harder than any clerk who consumes the midnight oil to add the payment of 'overtime' to the scanty subsistence he earns for his wife and family. And on his deathbed he repented it. 'I wish, my dear friends,' he murmured, pathetically, 'that I had enjoyed myself a little more.' It was not, to be sure, a very exalted aspiration at such a moment; but there was a good deal of sense in it. His mistake was a very common one with energetic and assiduous

persons. Elizabeth Dart, who was as diligent in her way as this dead Dives had ever been, had not fallen into his error. She had had, as she had told Mr. Leyden, a hard life of it, and seen those she loved enduring still worse things; and, while detesting idleness, she had a passionate yearning for peace and comfort—a wholesome desire for enjoyment, as different from the mere love of pleasure as the parson's whist differs from the gambling at Monaco. Though not so fortunate as the Fool in the Scripture, who had goods laid up for him for many years, she had reason to feel that her future was provided for—a reflection the surpassing comfort of which can be only understood by those who have no such provision.

Never in all her life had she felt so happy; the only drawback to her supreme content, in fact, was the obligation she had enjoined upon herself to keep from her friends the secret of her purchase of Battle Hill until the matter was actually effected. The information that the land had already been offered for a less sum than the lowest she was about to pay had considerably shaken her confidence in Mr. Snugg, and also in her own capabilities for dealing with him; so the rest of the arrangements she intrusted to Roger Leyden, a shrewd man of business enough, when not under the influence of the stars, or riding the hobby-horse of antiquity.

For all her prudent resolves, it is possible that she would not have been able to conceal from the loving eyes of those of the Look-out the unaccustomed exaltation of her spirits, had she not elsewhere found an excuse for them. Quite a large packet of letters had arrived for her from London, all of which contained good and even great news. They had been forwarded to her from the 'Millennium' office by Mr. Argand, but accompanied—as she noticed with some chagrin—by no line from himself. She had told him of her intention of coming down to Casterton, and she had thought he might have written to her a few words of congratulation in finding herself in a spot which he knew was so dear to her. She felt that it had now become necessary—since others had discovered it—to confess to him that she was the author of 'The Usher,' and the avowal was somehow made more difficult to her by his silence. Was it possible that he had found it out for himself, and was displeased, or even hurt, at her reticence?

It struck her, for the first time, that it was possible that a copy of Matthew's poems might have been sent to the 'Millennium' office; in which case the dedication of it, had it met Mr.

Argand's eye, would certainly have revealed her secret to him. This idea would have troubled her more, but for the contents of her letters, the importance of which for the moment monopolised her thoughts. They were all addressed, of course, to 'John Javelin, Esq.' Some of them were, as usual, applications for autographs; others, equally as usual, bore invitations to 'at-homes' and even dinner-parties from unknown 'lion hunters,' who have never the least scruple about the means they use to ensnare their prey. She had often received such communications, but never so many at a time. It was clear that her third contribution to the 'Millennium,' 'Opinion in Stories,' had greatly quickened the public curiosity about her. Such things are straws—but straws which show the direction in which the wind is blowing. There were three letters of another sort. No. 1 was from a firm of publishers, offering to purchase 'The Usher,' when completed, at the same price for which Mr. Rose had agreed with her. 'If, unhappily, that novel should have been disposed of, Messrs. Blank and Asterisk would be happy to make arrangements with the author for the copyright of his next story, on still more favourable terms.'

This communication was gratifying enough, yet it amazed even more than it pleased her. The rate at which news flies—out of which any profit is to be got—has never yet been calculated by the arithmetician; and it astonished Miss Dart to find that the identity of John Javelin with the author of 'The Usher' had been already discovered by an entire stranger. That it was somehow or other owing to the publication of Matthew's poems was certain, since Mr. Rose—who had his own reasons for keeping silence on the subject—had been the only repository of her secret.

No. 2 letter was from the proprietor of a popular magazine, offering a large sum for the serial right of publication of the successor to 'The Usher.' That there should be a successor it was taken for granted, as though it were a case of 'The King is dead. Long live the King!' As the copyright was not required in this instance, the arrangement for the sale of the book could probably be made with No. 1, independently from the proposal from the magazine.

No. 3 was from a newspaper association, to the same effect as No. 2, but promising still more liberal terms. The writer, it said, 'as a secretary to the syndicate,' was also empowered to offer a considerable portion of the purchase-money in

advance. In these propositions what would have seemed to her a few weeks ago a fortune, and what was, at all events, a large income, was assured to her for the next twelve months. If she had read her news aloud to her friends at the Look-out, it would have conferred almost as much pleasure upon them as it gave herself. They were not as the stranger 'who does but intermeddle with our joy;' the brightness of her prosperity would have gladdened them, and cast no shadow. But she remembered their own poverty, and only spoke of the encouragement she had received in general terms. It is an unusual reticence; for nothing is more common than for the prosperous to boast of their superfluous wealth in the presence of those to whom every shilling, as the phrase goes, is of consequence; though—like Narcissa—they would hardly, perhaps, dilate upon their last banquet to persons in want of a dinner. The heartfelt congratulations of her friends were not less enjoyable to Lizzie because her mind was occupied with thoughts of how her new-found wealth could best be used in serving them. If death could not be averted (and she secretly nourished a hope that somehow it might be so) from that hospitable door, poverty, at least, she resolved, should never set foot in it. If money ever brought a happy day, it was that day. At eve fell its first shadow. On returning to the inn before dinner, she found a letter from Mr. Argand.

'My dear Miss Dart,—Though somewhat late—for the world has known your secret, it appears, for some days—I hasten to congratulate you most heartily and sincerely upon your well-earned honours. If I do not say "I am not surprised," it is not because I entertained the least doubt of your genius or dreamt of assigning to it any limit; it is only that it seems a little strange that you should have reposed a confidence in others which was denied to myself. You will, perhaps, justly reply that a professional critic should have discovered this mystery for himself, or that the personal interest with which I hope you will credit me should have given me some clue to it. Well, I do not defend myself. I will now take comfort from the reflection that my ignorance enabled me to speak of "The Usher" to your own ear in such terms of eulogy as, for fear of being suspected of flattery, I could hardly have employed had I known you to be its author. It is something, too, gained on your part, to have acquired a critic's real opinion without those "buts" and "ifs" in

whose company it always appears when he is on his guard. Before you, my dear Miss Dart, lies the most pleasant literary future that has ever presented itself to one of your sex and age ; I shall watch it with the utmost interest from afar. Perhaps, after all, it is the fact that I am about to relinquish my position as an editor—or, I should rather say, the circumstances which have compelled me to accept that course—which has made me blind to your handiwork. When the mind is full of business matters it loses its delicacy of discernment. There is one thing of a material kind that gives me much trouble in connection with your admirable story—it was offered by the unknown author to the “*Millennium*” for a sum out of all proportion, as is now abundantly manifest, to its value. It was, no doubt, your modest judgment of his merits that caused you to put so insignificant a price upon it ; but I need hardly say that had I continued to direct the magazine, this mistake would have been rectified. In view of the great increase of circulation which “*The Usher*” has conferred upon it, some new arrangement would indeed appear imperative. These matters are now unfortunately out of my hands, and may possibly be without remedy. I remember in one of our early talks together, you spoke (as it seemed to me without reason) of one of the chief drawbacks of your condition in life as being the inability to do good : how much worse, then, you will easily understand, is the position of one who cannot do even simple justice. However, let us have done with vain regrets. One would think this was a letter of condolence rather than of congratulation. As I have often told you, it is only a matter of “*how long*” as to when genius such as yours receives its recognition ; but the most consoling reflection which I shall carry with me into obscurity is that while I played my part as a stage manager of literature I had the great happiness of bringing before the footlights one of its brightest ornaments. My sister unites her most kind regards with mine, and I am always, my dear Miss Dart, your most faithful friend and well-wisher,

‘FELIX ARGAND.’

CHAPTER XLIV.

MR. LEYDEN'S REPRESENTATIVE.

THE arrangements at the Welcome were primitive, and it was fortunate for Miss Dart that this letter had been brought to her own room instead of being left, as usual, to await the return of the ladies in the sitting-room; its effect upon her could hardly have been concealed from any spectator, much less from such loving eyes as those of Aunt Jane. The colour, which expectation had evoked in her face as she opened the missive, faded gradually from cheek and lip as she perused it; when she concluded it, it seemed to her that her very heart had stopped beating. To learn that by her reticence she had hurt so kind and dear a friend was distressing enough to her; but, to her mind, it was only too clear that there was something more amiss with Felix Argand than wounded feelings. That some heavy misfortune of a material kind had befallen him she was convinced, and even behind that must needs lurk something worse to have caused him to give up that beloved offspring of his own creation, the 'Millennium.' He had, indeed, on a previous occasion hinted at the possibility of its passing into other hands; but his words had had no immediate, nor, as it seemed, any very practical significance. They had been uttered like the 'If anything happens to me' of the parent still far from old age and in good health, when he speaks of the provision made for his children. 'Whoever is editor of the "Millennium,"' he had said, 'your support, you may be sure, will be always welcome to him.' But now, it seemed to her, the reins of government had been wholly surrendered—nay, snatched—out of his hands.

On most occasions of social catastrophe, the cause of which is unknown, imagination has only too free scope to search for it; the answer to that 'What *can* he have done?' may assume any shape, however monstrous. But in this case, of one thing, at least, Elizabeth Dart was certain—that whatever Felix Argand had done, it was nothing to be ashamed of. Her opinion of him was the highest she had ever entertained of any man, and it stood upon a rock. Her feelings towards him had hitherto, indeed, been of the nature of those of a worshipper towards his patron saint; she had regarded him

as guide, philosopher, and friend, but less as friend, perhaps, than as in the former characters; she had had an affectionate respect for him that was, even yet, not unmixed with awe. But now that he was in trouble, her sentiments experienced a sudden change. He seemed to be drawn nearer to her, and, without losing his noble attributes, to appear in a more familiar garb. She had never feared him with that fear which casts out love; but her admiration for his character had placed him on a pedestal out of the reach of familiar recognition; now she saw him as he was—very sorrowful, and therefore very human; and she yearned, in vain, to comfort him.

He had, evidently, no expectation of comfort from her. Like some monarch fallen from his high estate, he seemed to wrap his kingly robes about him for the last time, and to take a dignified adieu of those who had stood about his throne. But there was no evidence of emotion: he sought for no sympathy, far less for consolation. He had befriended many like herself, as she knew; perhaps there were others to whom he had addressed similar words of farewell. She said this to herself, yet found herself unwilling to believe the speaker. Not even Felix Argand could have been so kind to any other as he had been to her. With what judgment had he advised her! With what praise had he encouraged her! With what enthusiasm had he fought her battles! Each act of friendship he had shown recurred to her with marvellous particularity; from the first letter he had written to her, as an unknown correspondent, down to that evening when he had been so indignant against the poor man who had said her essays 'were not literature.' Though it was now evident that he had thought far more highly of 'The Usher' than of her earlier productions—indeed, if it was good at all, it stood on a much higher plane, as being a far more ambitious performance—how courteously he had refrained from hinting at it, lest he should wound her susceptibilities. His behaviour indeed, at all times had been marked by the tenderest delicacy. Was there not something in this very letter, it suddenly struck her, that seemed to savour of a wish to spare her—something omitted, rather than hinted, which suggested separation? It was, on the face of it, only a letter of farewell, inasmuch as it announced a dissolution of their literary connection as editor and contributor; but, between the lines, there suddenly seemed to appear a purpose of departure. Why was there

not one word said of her return to town, or of any time when they might again meet one another? When once this idea had obtained entrance into her mind it grew, like the enchanted helmet in the Castle of Otranto, till it gradually filled every chamber of it. If she was right in her surmise, if Mr. Argand was really contemplating not only the relinquishment of his review, but his leaving London—or, perhaps, England itself—it was strange, indeed, that his sister, at least, should not have written to her of his intention. But, on the other hand, Miss Argand—though she occasionally rebelled against him—was, on the whole, a loyal subject to her brother, and, if he had enjoined silence upon her with respect to any subject, would certainly keep it.

When we are young, balmy sleep is easily wooed, and will endure much before she forsakes us; but Elizabeth Dart scarce closed her eyes that night, so consumed she was with vague alarms; so importuned by the incessant thought, 'What is Felix Argand's trouble, and what can I do to help him?'

In the morning, while they were still at breakfast, Roger Leyden was announced.

In any other case Miss Dart, who had a high opinion of his judgment, would have asked his opinion upon the matter that was oppressing her; but she justly considered that Mr. Argand's affairs should not be discussed with one who was a stranger to him.

There was something, too, in the antiquary's manner of self-conscious importance and ill-concealed satisfaction that would of itself have discouraged a confidence that sought for sympathy. He accepted her invitation to partake of their meal, though she knew he had already breakfasted, and was unusually vivacious and talkative. She guessed, as she thought, the reason of the exaltation of his spirits, and but yesterday would have shared them. He was to undertake that little matter of business for her with Mr. Snugg that morning, and was no doubt elated with the prospect. The looks he cast at her and then at the unconscious Mrs. Richter were full of sly significance: once when the widow thanked him for his offer to show her the wonders of the castle, he replied that it was only his 'duty to his neighbour.'

'We must not be too sure,' murmured Miss Dart, gravely.

It was even in her mind to put an end for the present to the negotiations at which he hinted, altogether; she had now

no heart for it ; it seemed an ungrateful and ungracious thing to be thinking of her own gratification when misfortune, as she felt certain, was dogging the heels of her good friend in town. But Mr. Leyden only smiled at her warning whisper : smiled and winked, and tapped his breast pocket, which she then noticed for the first time had an unusual protrusion.

'You don't mean to say you have done it?' exclaimed Lizzie, surprised out of herself.

'Indeed, I do ; there is nothing wanting to complete the bargain but your signature. I was so frightened at what you said yesterday about the cup and the lip, that I called on Snugg this morning, before office hours, and settled everything. I've got it here,' and again he tapped his pocket exultingly.

'What is it Mr. Leyden has got for you, my dear?' inquired Aunt Jane, who was dissecting a shrimp.

The antiquary threw a glance at Lizzie, which seemed to say, 'Shall I tell her?' It was a pleasure she had reserved for herself ; but somehow the good news had lost its savour. She very willingly left the pleasant task to Mr. Leyden.

'It is Battle Hill,' said the antiquary, brimming over with his secret. 'I had quite a difficulty in getting it into my pocket ; but here it is,' and he laid a bulky document upon the table. Mrs. Richter looked at Lizzie with apprehension. Though she liked Roger Leyden very well, she had been from the first a good deal afraid of him ; she had heard of his doings with the stars, and his wanderings on the Hill ; but it now struck her that he was something more than eccentric—stark, staring mad.

'Mr. Leyden only means that I have bought the Hill, Aunt Jane,' said Lizzie, reassuringly.

'Bought the Hill ? bought the Hill ?' murmured the little widow. She looked towards the door this time, for she began to think that her niece had also taken leave of her senses.

'Yes, I have bought it ; or as good as bought it. I hope to build a little cottage on it one day, for you and me to live in together.'

'It is impossible, Lizzie ; it is too good to be true.'

'Why should it not be true, Aunt Jane?' answered her niece, caressingly. 'You are as good as can be ; yet you are not too good to be true. It has been your experience hitherto, I know, that nothing that is pleasant can be meant for you.'

I hope, please God, that life will henceforth have a brighter side for you.'

'A brighter side—to live here in this lovely spot—and with you, Lizzie—it seems like Heaven itself.'

'It is also like Heaven, in being some little way off at present,' said Lizzie, smiling. 'It must be a long time before we begin to build our nest.'

'But you have made sure of the tree,' said the antiquary, exultingly; 'that is the great point; you have only to come across the way and set your hand to this document in the presence of witnesses, and Battle Hill is yours. It must be a great satisfaction to you, my dear Mrs. Richter, to possess a niece who is a landed proprietor.'

'She is everything she ought to be, I'm sure,' said Aunt Jane, approvingly. 'Would you mind, my dear Lizzie, if I left you for a few minutes to have a look at it?'

'A look at what?'

'The Hill; I can see it from my bedroom window, you know.'

The amazing news had been rather too much for the little widow, and she yearned for an opportunity of realising it alone. Her intense happiness had communicated itself, in spite of herself, to Lizzie, and for the moment she forgot her trouble.

'Did you ever see any one so delighted as dear Aunt Jane, Mr. Leyden? I wonder if so much pleasure was ever before purchased for 400*l.*?'

'To be exact, for 350*l.*,' observed the antiquary.

'But I had undertaken to pay 400*l.*, and——'

'Yes; but that was before you knew the Hill had been offered to Bolt, the grazier, for 350*l.* I represented to Mr. Snugg that the effect of that discovery upon your mind might be very disadvantageous to him as a builder, if matters were not arranged to your satisfaction.'

'My dear Mr. Leyden, how can I ever repay you for your great kindness and all the trouble——'

'Hush, hush! If ever there was a case where the phrase "the trouble is a pleasure" had a literal application, it is this case; but, as a matter of fact, there is a fee attached to my poor services. I have a little memorandum here, but I will read the other document first, to save time, at Mr. Snugg's.' With that the antiquary began to read the deed in question, not without a certain enjoyment of its quaint and

old-world phraseology, from the comparatively high-and-dry land of 'This indenture witnesseth,' through the morasses of iteration, 'heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, and every of them by these present and pursuant to and by force and virtue, and in execution of the power or powers, authority or authorities of, &c.,' into yellowest fog.

'You understand all this, I hope, my dear Miss Dart?' said Roger Leyden, after an exceptionally severe struggle with half-a-dozen extinct but jaw-breaking synonyms.

'Not one single word of it,' was the candid reply.

'That is a pity, for it has a fine old smack about it, and reminds one of black letter.'

'It looks like black letter, too. Why, in the name of common-sense, can't these things be written so as to be read, and in language that is intelligible?'

'That is a question you must put to the lawyers. Perhaps it would tend to make law cheap; and there is nothing so dear, so the lawyers say, as cheap law. Do you care to hear the rest of it, or shall we take it as read?'

'We will take it as read, by all means.'

'Very good. And now there is the memorandum I have jotted down, in which you undertake, as possessor of Battle Hill, to make over to my representatives—that is, any one I choose to appoint in my place—or to me, one half of such ancient treasure as may be found there, or the value of it. It is merely a matter of form.'

'But since it is legible, and can be understood of the people,' remarked Miss Dart, pointing to the MS. in question, which her companion kept folded in his hand, 'why should I not see it? I have read in books of virtuous and trustful women signing away all their property to designing wretches, without having the least idea that they were doing anything of the kind.'

'Well, if you must, you must,' said the antiquary, reluctantly.

'But I do not see your name in the document at all, Mr. Leyden?'

'Why, no; I have left a blank to be filled up at the last moment by my representative.'

'Heirs and assigns?' suggested Miss Dart, with the proud conscientiousness of newly acquired learning.

'Well, Mary is not exactly that, you see.'

'Mary? Do you mean Mary Melburn?'

‘Well, of course I do. You don’t suppose I wanted all that money for myself?’ (he always spoke of the treasure as if it were in a bank instead of a hill). ‘Besides, I may be dead a quarter of a century before you find it; and Matthew will be dead, poor lad, for certain. He will have what little I have to leave him—unless, indeed, I am so unfortunate as to survive him—and will therefore be my heir. That is why I said representative; and I knew you would not be displeased to find it was Mary.’

‘Of course not, my dear Mr. Leyden,’ assented Lizzie, tenderly. Though she knew that it mattered absolutely nothing to any one to whom the visionary property was assigned, she was touched by the antiquary’s precision in a matter which to him had all the solidity of fact. Many men have their hobbies, but they ride them for their own ends. To keep a hobby for some one else’s advantage is a very rare occurrence indeed. Miss Dart appreciated it accordingly. She said, with her brightest smile, ‘Let us go across to Mr. Snugg, and make sure of “our property.”’

CHAPTER XLV.

‘I HAVE DONE YOU WRONG.’

THE signing and sealing by which Elizabeth Dart was transferred into a landed proprietor was performed with as little of ‘the law’s delay’ as has probably ever entered into such a proceeding; it was a ready-money transaction, and the vendor, as represented by Mr. Snugg, was as desirous for the completion of the contract as the vendee. In twenty minutes the antiquary and his young friend were back at the Welcome. He parted from her at the door, rightly imagining that she would prefer to receive her relative’s congratulations alone. Aunt Jane was waiting for her in the parlour, with pale face and anxious eyes.

‘There has been no hitch, my dear,’ cried Lizzie, cheerfully, in answer to her troubled looks; ‘the Hill is ours; kiss me, while I am still affable and not yet spoiled by my proud position of being a lady of the land.’

Aunt Jane threw herself on her neck, and burst into tears. ‘I congratulate you a thousand times, my darling, and with

all my heart. It ought to be the happiest day of my life, I’m sure.’

‘ And what *ought* to be, I beg you will understand for the future *is*,’ replied Lizzie, with severity. ‘ When people are poor, this present sphere may not seem the best possible of worlds to them; but remember that you and I have henceforth nothing in common with such folk. We are a prosperous couple; and everything that is, is right. We cannot imagine what there is to complain of; we acknowledge, with humility, that everything is in accordance with the fitness of things; and you must allow me to add that all display of emotion is out of place in the best circles.’

‘ We are never out of the reach of misfortune, Lizzie, while we have friends who are within its grasp.’

‘ But, for the future, we must not know unfortunate people, Aunt Jane; we must only know carriage people—— What is the matter? Good Heavens! Has anything happened?’ cried Lizzie, dropping her bantering tone, and gazing on her companion’s face with sudden alarm.

‘ Mary has been here.’

‘ I see; the contrast between your pleasure and her trouble has vexed your gentle heart. So far from envying our happiness, she will share it. Did you tell her?’

‘ Oh no; I left that for your sweet lips, my darling; and besides, she called here about another matter that concerns yourself. She would have waited, but that Matthew is not so well this morning; or, perhaps, she could not bear to see your little spell of sunshine clouded. She brought this paper with her, in which there is bad news.’

‘ Poor Matthew! The “Parthenon”! Some slating of his poems—of those which were not published in its own columns, we may be quite sure. I wish the critics would transfer one half the praise they lavish on me to him.

They sit at home and turn an easy wheel
That sets sharp racks at work to pinch and peel.

I do not care to read it.’

‘ But it is not about Matthew; it is about Mr. Argand.’

‘ Great Heavens!’ The colour rushed from her face, and she seized the paper with trembling hands, that contrasted strangely indeed with her former indifference. ‘ Where is it? Where is it?’ she cried, impatiently.

‘It is only a literary note; but Matthew thought it of sufficient importance to send the paper on. It might, he said, be an exaggeration.’

‘Read it, read it,’ murmured Lizzie, hoarsely. Her eyes were blinded by fast-flowing tears.

‘We are sorry to say the reports that have been floating in the air of literary circles, for some time, concerning the retirement of Mr. Argand from the management of the “Millennium” have assumed only too much consistency. This will be a great blow to serial literature. The fact is to be regretted on all accounts, but especially if, as we understand, the misfortune is connected with financial difficulties.’

‘Is it not bad news? Such a good kind man as he is,’ interrupted Mrs. Richter. ‘What is it you want, Lizzie?’

She did not answer; she had already got the book in her hand that she was looking for. It was a ‘Bradshaw,’ which they had brought down with them. She turned over the pages of the guide with faltering fingers and that eager haste which is ‘half-sister to Delay.’ At last she found the place.

‘Aunt Jane, I am going back to town at once,’ she said decisively. ‘But that must not cut short your holiday. You can either stop here, or stay with our friends at the Look-out, who will be delighted to see you. It is impossible to say how long I may be away, but I hope not long.’

‘And do you think I could stay here enjoying myself, while you, as I know by your dear face, are in trouble and misery?’ cried the little woman in a tone of tender remonstrance.

‘Why not?’ answered the girl, bitterly. ‘What have I been doing these three days, while my best friend has been drinking the cup of bitterness to the dregs?—full of dreams of pleasure and prosperity, while he has been surrounded with the rising tide of ruin—a niggard, when I might perhaps have helped him—ungrateful and unkind, a worthless creature.’ Her face was drawn and haggard, her tone vehement and remorseful; she moved to the bell, and rang it violently. ‘Can I have a fly to go to the station?’

‘I am sorry to say, ma’am,’ said the maid, ‘it has gone out.’

‘No matter, I can walk.’

‘I can walk too,’ pleaded Aunt Jane.

‘No, my dear, no,’ said Lizzie, falling at once into her

usual tone of tenderness. ‘You shall follow, if you really wish it, in the afternoon; you will do me a greater favour by so doing than by accompanying me, welcome as your companionship always is. I must go alone; and, just now, I cannot bear any questioning even from the lips I love. Say to my dear friends that I have pressing business, literary business, in London. I have not a moment to lose if I would catch the express. Here is my purse—pay everything; and when you come home to-night, you will see your Lizzie, I trust, herself again. I am so sorry, so very sorry, to cut short your little holiday, my darling.’

One swift embrace, and she was gone. Aunt Jane watched her from the window, moving quickly down the narrow street, with gaze set straight before her: a traveller with a purpose.

‘If I did not know she was a genius, I should say the dear girl was daft,’ murmured the little widow. ‘I feel almost daft myself. Think of being left all alone in an hotel, in a private sitting-room, with a purse of gold in my hand! I feel like somebody in a parable.’

In the meantime, Elizabeth Dart passed on her way without looking right or left—not a glance even did she cast on Battle Hill as she went by it. The place, though it had become her own, had not only no attraction for her now, but had something repulsive about it. She had spent money on it which might have served a better purpose, and it would be difficult to realise such a property, even at a loss. It had been the foundation for schemes of pleasure and ambition which she had been weaving for herself, while the man to whom she was indebted for all she had, had been writhing in a net of embarrassment. She had not known it, indeed; but she might have guessed it. She did not blame Mr. Argand for having withheld his confidence from her, as he had tacitly reproached *her* for doing. She set it down rightly to his unwillingness to cause her pain; but the fact that she had received the first news of his misfortune from a paragraph in a newspaper filled her with humiliation.

She reached the railway station without the least consciousness of how she had arrived there. She only knew she was in time to catch the train; the journey by rail was accomplished in the same mechanical manner. On reaching town, she took a cab and drove at once to Harewood Square. It was some little comfort to her that the house wore its familiar look. If, as she reproached herself, she had hitherto

not been alive sufficiently to the misfortunes that were pressing upon Felix Argand, they now loomed large enough before her mental vision, and she would hardly have been astonished had she found his home untenanted, and bills of sale in its windows. Everything, however, wore the same appearance as usual. It was with a beating heart that Elizabeth Dart waited for the servant's reply to the question whether his master was at home. It was long past the usual hour for his departure to his office, but perhaps his occupation there was already gone, and there was no need for him to leave his roof. Quite a weight seemed taken from her mind when the man replied, 'He is not at home, Miss.'

'Can I see Miss Argand?' was her next inquiry.

If she had couched the question in the same terms as before, she would doubtless have received the same reply; it was evident by the servant's manner that he had received orders to deny his mistress to all callers; on the other hand, he knew she was a friend of the family.

'I am not quite sure, Miss; she is not very well,' he hesitated.

'Please to say that my business is important, and very pressing.' After some interval he returned, and ushered her into the drawing-room. It was a pleasant apartment enough as she remembered it, but in the morning it had an artificial and untimely look. Already the guests who had been wont to enliven it were wanting; where the murmur of pleasant talk had been, and the ripple of laughter, there was silence, and to Miss Dart's foreboding spirit it seemed to have already lost its atmosphere of home. The whole house, like one over which the shadow of calamity has fallen, was very still. Presently, a slow and unelastic step was heard upon the stairs, and Miss Argand entered. She was dressed as usual, and there was no outward sign of woe; she had even a smile upon her face as she greeted her visitor, though it flitted away in a second, like a sunray from a mirror, leaving it cold and cheerless.

'You have returned to town earlier than you intended, have you not, Miss Dart?' she inquired, in cold mechanical tones.

'Yes—oh, yes! but not so early as I ought to have done. I ought never to have left it.'

'Why not?'

'Because, as I fear, you are in trouble.'

'Who told you that? Not Felix?' cried Miss Argand, quickly, and darting a penetrating glance at her companion.

'Oh no; your brother has told me nothing—or only what the world knows.'

'You mean about his giving up the "Millennium"?' Yes, he has decided upon doing that. It will make, however, one is pleased to know, no difference with your connection with it. I congratulate you upon the great success of "The Usher"; every one, they tell me, is talking about it. It was a great surprise to him to find you were the author.'

'Has my silence upon the subject forfeited his friendship, Miss Argand?' cried Lizzie, suddenly. 'What have I done? Great Heavens! what *have* I done to be so treated? When I was unknown and poor he was my best and kindest friend, but now——'

'Well, that is it,' interrupted Miss Argand. 'Your positions are reversed, you see. You are prosperous and will be rich, while he, my brother Felix, is penniless and ruined.'

Her first words were uttered with studious coldness, her last in a tone trembling with emotion; when she had done her face fell forward on her hand and she sobbed like a child.

Elizabeth Dart rose from her chair and fell upon her knees beside her.

'Miss Argand, dear Miss Argand, who love and pity him so, have a little pity on me. You say when he was prosperous and I was poor that he was my friend, but that now our positions are reversed. I take you at your word: let me be his friend now! There is nothing, nothing in the world that I would not do for him. All I have is his, and I am here to offer it; only tell me what I can do!'

The vehemence and passion of her tone were intense, yet her voice was distinct and clear—the voice of a woman who, though she may have lost her heart, still keeps her head. Miss Argand looked at her with streaming eyes, but with an expression not so much of sorrow as of surprise and remorse.

'I have done you wrong, Miss Dart,' she murmured.

'No matter what you have done, no matter about me at all. Only tell me how I can help him. How much does he owe? When has he got to pay it? Will 500*l.* be of any service to him?'

Miss Argand shook her head, and smiled sadly but very tenderly.

‘You good, dear girl, but it is of no use.’

‘I can get more; I am sure I can get more; only let me know exactly how he stands and how much he owes.’

‘He owes nothing. The company in which he had put his all has been wound up. The last call has been made, and he has paid it with his last shilling. This house is sold as it stands, and there is nothing in it we can call our own. He leaves this day month for Australia; he has accepted, I believe, some appointment in Melbourne; but I do not trouble him with questions.’

‘But the “Millennium”?’

‘The “Millennium” is his own for one more issue, then the mortgage he raised upon it for this unfortunate speculation will be foreclosed.’

‘What is its amount?’

‘Two thousand pounds.’

‘But the “Review” must be worth more than that. His editorship has made a great success of it.’

‘Just so; when he has resigned I am told it will be valueless, but the mortgagee is a man of letters, Mr. Doris, whom you have met here, who wishes to undertake it himself. I think Felix might have got the money advanced to him at one time, but he is very proud, and would ask no help of any man.’

‘Thank Heaven for that!’ murmured Elizabeth Dart.

‘You must never tell him that I told you all this,’ continued Miss Argand. ‘It would wound him to the quick; but not worse,’ she added, with a sigh, ‘than it wounds me.’

‘Why should it wound you to tell me about him?’

‘Because, though you cannot help him, I am sure you would do if you could, and I have never given you credit for such generosity. On the contrary, I thought—but, as you say, it is no matter what I thought. I picture to myself all day my brother and his future; with all his talents I fear he is not one to make his way in a new world; his career is closed, his ambition is quenched. He has already, Heaven help him! the look of a broken man. He will be home to lunch with us, but you will be shocked to see him.’

‘I would not see him for the world,’ was Miss Dart’s unexpected reply. ‘That is, I mean not like that.’ She rose at once as if in alarm lest he should return and find her. ‘When will he not be here? when, that is, can I see you alone to-day, my dear Miss Argand?’

‘Any time this evening. Felix dines out to-night with his

Melbourne friend, to conclude, I understand, some final arrangements.'

'Then I will look in at eight o'clock, if you will not be very tired of me?'

'I shall not be that,' smiled Miss Argand, sadly. 'The time is coming, and very shortly, when I shall pine for the sight of an old friend in vain. But you must not hide yourself from Felix. If he knew that you were in town, it would distress him beyond measure to think you had avoided him.'

'But he must not know I am in town—until to-night, at all events. I must beg of you to keep my visit a secret.'

'As you please, my dear,' sighed Miss Argand: 'good-bye, and God bless you!' She uttered the last words with fervent earnestness, and, drawing her young companion towards her, pressed her lips to her forehead.

CHAPTER XLVI.

RAISING THE WIND.

MISS DART was well accustomed to make her way about town alone, but she had never felt so lonely as when she left Mr. Argand's door. A companion, indeed, in the sense of a protector, she did not need. Even Aunt Jane would, just now, have been superfluous, and in her way; but she stood in the utmost need of an adviser; and the only man who could have helped her in her difficulties was the last to whom she could apply. Nevertheless, she was not without a scheme, which she had thought out for herself in the railway train; and she put it into practice at once. In the first place, she called in the New Road to advise the landlady of her aunt's expected return, and also to fetch certain papers of her own, which she put away in a little hand-bag; and then she took a hansom to Paternoster Row.

She had visited it not many days before, and upon a similar errand; but to-day her business was far more pressing and important. She endeavoured to picture to herself in what state she would return an hour or two hence. Would success or failure have resulted from her efforts? Even if the latter should happen, there would still be a hope, though a very

slender one, of obtaining her desire. The consciousness of its existence, however—the knowledge that there was yet a second line of defence behind her should the first prove useless—supported her wonderfully. She was naturally of a sanguine disposition, and her experience of life had strengthened it. Those who have known trouble and disappointment are not so easily depressed as those who find themselves for the first time face to face with extremity.

It seemed to her of good augury, to begin with, that Mr. Rose, whom she proposed to visit, was at home. If he had been out of town, as, considering the season, he well might have been, half her hopes would have been cut off at once; for the success of her mission was, she felt, dependent upon the promptness of its issue. A week—perhaps a day—hence, his help, even if she attained it, might be valueless.

Mr. Rose was not among the princes of the publishing trade; but still less did he belong to its pettifoggers. He had not been long enough established to be held in the first rank of the Row; but he had a long head, a long purse, and plenty of pluck. If he was not acknowledged by the great houses as a rival, they had cause to regret his existence. He was not very particular about the courtesies of 'the trade,' and on two or three occasions had lured a popular author from his literary proprietor by the jingling of his guineas. But he had never yet discovered a writer of any standing for himself till he made that offer of a thousand pounds to the unknown author of 'The Usher.'

He had also, as we know, published Matthew Meyrick's poems. The former of these operations had been speculative. His opinion of the novel was very high, and he believed, in time, he should see his money back. The latter had arisen from no hope of gain. He had brought out the poems because they were good poems, and would reflect credit upon him as a publisher. He was no money-grubber, though he liked to make money; he resented being reckoned with the rank and file of his calling, and aspired to be one of the Rulers of the Row. Still, he had not been born in its purple, and had some ways that were by no means Royal ways. He was not quite a gentleman, although he had very narrowly missed being one. His appearance was in his favour. Though of small stature, he had a leonine head and handsome features; his hair was grey, and his face almost colourless; but his black eyes were so large and brilliant, that their searching

glance, turned upon an author who had received advances without advancing with his MS., reminded him of the dark-lantern of a policeman.

‘To see you again so soon is, indeed, an unexpected pleasure, Miss Dart,’ he said, as she was ushered into his sanctum; but those who knew him best would have gathered that his feelings were not quite so cordial as his words. He had by no means lost faith in his newly discovered genius, and was far from repenting of his bargain with her; but it promised to be a less profitable one—thanks to Mr. Argand’s hint, ‘If I were the author of “The Usher,” I would sell it for five years, and not for perpetuity’—than he had proposed to himself. When he first set eyes upon her, it seemed to him that she was a client after his own heart; and he was surprised, and not a little disappointed, to find her such a stickler for her rights. It was ‘not pretty of her,’ or what her youth and inexperience had led him to expect, and it had put him out in his calculations; still, he had no mistrust of his own judgment. He had read the whole novel, and what he had heard of it upon all sides had strengthened his opinion of its exceptional merit. He was perfectly satisfied with his bargain; what he feared from Miss Dart’s reappearance was that she was not satisfied, and had come to ask for more money. Of course, there was no need to give it. The arrangement had been ratified and was legally binding; but he was very disinclined to quarrel with a writer who, to use a significant expression peculiar to ‘the Row,’ had evidently a good deal of meat on her bones. It may be thought that it was not very chivalrous of Mr. Rose to believe his fair client capable of putting pressure upon him in such a matter, and so soon; but his experience of female authors was that they were not much swayed by delicate scruples in these arrangements, and that within twelve hours of the conclusion of a literary bargain they always regretted it, and thought they ought to have got better terms. Advisers are rarely wanting to them who believe in their transcendent genius to any extent (short of investing in it), and in the universal peccability of publishers.

The first words of his visitor were very far from removing his apprehensions upon this point, though they were uttered in a very gentle and modest voice, and not at all in that tone of grievance, or of even righteous indignation, in which such applications were usually made.

'I am come to you upon a matter which to me is of very great importance, Mr. Rose. I wish, if possible, to obtain a very considerable sum of money at once?'

Mr. Rose smiled and raised his eyebrows. 'It is not an uncommon case, my dear madam,' he replied, drily. 'Everybody wants money, and most of us immediately. In fact, it has been observed that there is no one upon the earth's surface, however wealthy, to whom a thousand pounds wouldn't be acceptable, and that even the richest people are often hard up for ready money.'

'I am even more greedy than the millionaire of whom you speak,' was Miss Dart's quiet reply, 'for I want two thousand pounds in bank-notes.'

'Really!' It was only a word, but it seemed weighted with the stolid indifference of a whole tribe of North American Indians. The speaker looked wistfully at the unfinished letter, which he had pushed away from him on the desk at her entrance into the room, and then at the clock that stood upon his mantelpiece. 'These aspirations,' his face seemed to say, 'would be interesting, if I had time to consider them, on account of their abnormal size; but my time is valuable, and they have no personal relation to myself.'

'If you cannot help me yourself, Mr. Rose,' continued Miss Dart, with a tinge of colour in her anxious face, 'you will not at least, I hope, refuse me the benefit of your advice, under circumstances which you will understand as well as any man, and infinitely better than any one else to whom I could apply. I have another novel here'—she produced a large manuscript from her bag—'not, indeed, written, but sketched in skeleton fashion from beginning to end. I believe it in many ways to be superior to "The Usher"; it is, at all events, the result of a larger experience. I will not take up your time with it, if you think that its realisation of the sum I mention is out of the question, as far as you are concerned. I could leave it with you for two hours, but not more, as, in case of refusal, it would be but so much lost time; and it is absolutely necessary for me to procure the money before the banks close.'

Mr. Rose—who had pricked up his ears, 'like a horse that hears the corn-bin open,' at the words 'another novel'—laid them down again at this reference to the bank. He shook his head, and observed, curtly, 'It is quite out of the

question, Miss Dart; I have gone to the end of my tether with you already.'

'Very good: it is kind of you, at least, not to delude me with false hopes. Please to consider yourself no longer as the possible publisher of the novel, but as my friend and adviser as to its disposal. Here are three letters I received yesterday. This one is from Messrs. Blank and Asterisk, your next-door neighbours.'

Mr. Rose took the letter, with a smile that was intended to express a polite interest; but its effect was grim. Messrs. Blank and Asterisk were his neighbours—even as Miss Dart had said, his next neighbours—but he could scarcely be said to love them as himself. He had lately had a dispute with them over the body of an author—a question of certain copy-rights he had left behind him—and they had worsted him. He did not like that expression 'unhappily' in their communication: 'Unhappily, "The Usher" has been disposed of.' They knew it was disposed of well enough, and to him; and it was great impertinence of them to use that word. Still less did he like the phrase, 'on still more favourable terms.' It was a vague but no less nefarious attempt to decoy his author away from him—to rob him of his one laurel, his first genius.

'If Messrs. Blank and Asterisk will sign you two thousand pounds for that—that skeleton'—he exclaimed, bitterly, 'I should certainly recommend you to accept their offer.'

'And you will even go the length of wishing them joy of their bargain,' said Miss Dart, smiling.

'Well, I did not say so; but if I must say the honest truth, I think it would be a ridiculously lavish offer.'

'No doubt, as the matter stands; but here are two applications for the same work—one from a magazine, the other from a syndicate of newspapers, which may require the serial rights. Now, would not Messrs. Blank and Asterisk take one of these offers into account, and, by the purchase of all rights at once, recoup themselves for a portion of their outlay?'

'No doubt they would, if only the novel were finished; though, even in that case, it would show considerably more spirit than they are generally credited with. The fact is, my dear young lady,' added Mr. Rose, in gentler tones, 'there is a risk in the matter which one has a delicacy in mentioning to you; but, though your novel may be a masterpiece, when

you have clothed your skeleton, as you call it, it may never be clothed at all.'

'You mean that I may die in the meantime.'

Mr. Rose nodded. 'Such accidents do happen, even to the healthiest and youngest of us. The works of our great authors live for ever'—here he bowed, perhaps to point a complimentary allusion to 'The Usher'; 'but the authors themselves inherit the common lot. Now, where should I be, financially speaking, my dear Madam, if I gave 2,000*l.* for these dry bones, and anything should happen to you before you breathed life into them?'

'You are left out of the question altogether, you know,' observed Miss Dart, quietly; 'we were talking of Messrs. Blank and Asterisk. Now, what I thought of proposing to them was to insure my life for this money, and to place the policy in their hands till I gave them the complete MS. in exchange for it.'

'An uncommonly good idea, Miss Dart,' exclaimed Mr. Rose, approvingly. 'Make over "The Usher" in perpetuity, instead of giving only a five-years' right in it, and the sum you require for your next book shall be yours.'

'But Messrs. Blank and Asterisk have not got "The Usher,"' returned Miss Dart, with an innocent air.

'Neither have they got two thousand pounds at call on their banker's hands,' replied Mr. Rose, audaciously. 'Now, I should just give you a cheque for the money, and you could get it changed in Fleet Street in five minutes. Only think, too, what a disadvantage it would be for you to be offering your wares from publisher to publisher instead of sticking to a respectable house like mine, which you have been connected with from the first. There is nothing, to my mind, more unpleasant—as a matter of feeling—than disloyalty of this kind. If you'll allow me, I'll just get down the heads of our little agreement for your signature.'

'There must be nothing about "The Usher" in it, Mr. Rose,' said Miss Dart, decisively. 'The advice that was given me with respect to the disposal of that novel, I am bound to respect; but as to this other, I will sign anything you please.'

For the next ten minutes Mr. Rose said nothing, but employed with diligence a practised pen. Then he suddenly turned round with, 'After all, by Jove! there is a risk. I take for granted that you will insure your life as soon as the

thing can be done ; but suppose anything should happen to you before ?'

'I'll be very careful,' said Miss Dart, humbly. 'I'll look on both sides of the crossings.'

'Crossings ! you must not put your foot to the ground.'

'Very good ; and I will always choose the safest of patent safety hansoms.'

'Heavens ! you must not dream of getting into a hansom ; you must always take a four-wheeled cab.'

'It is very hot weather for four-wheelers ; but you shall be obeyed, Mr. Rose.'

'And there is one thing, though it's scarcely worth while to mention it, there must be no longer any concealment of your real name.'

'Oh ! Mr. Rose, I had so much rather not,' pleaded Miss Dart.

'You have promised me you will agree to anything I please in this matter,' he answered, coldly, 'and that is one of my stipulations. The mystery that has hitherto been maintained about you has been very useful ; but the time has now come for putting an end to it. When the world hears that the author of "The Usher" and of those admirable essays is a lady, it will have something to talk about, or I'm much mistaken.'

'But I don't want to be talked about, Mr. Rose.'

'That is only because you don't know what's good for you. To be talked about, in the case of an author, is to be read ; to be read, is to be bought ; and to be bought,' concluded the publisher, with the air of one in search of a climax, 'well—to be bought, is the laurel crown of literature.'

'Yet Milton's "Paradise Lost" was sold, it is said, for fifteen pounds,' said Miss Dart, smiling.

'And a deuced lucky fellow he was to get it. I should like to see Messrs. Blank and Asterisk giving fifteen pounds for "Paradise Lost," or even bringing it out at half profits. There's your cheque, Miss Dart, I will get it changed at the bank for you myself, and then see you safely into your cab, for both our sakes.'

CHAPTER XLVII.

AN EXPLANATION.

MR. ROSE, to do him justice, whether a matter was great or small, was always as good as his word. He accompanied Miss Dart to the bank, and drew for her forty notes of fifty each—an 'operation' which would otherwise have embarrassed her not a little. On the way thither he talked of other things, and among them of the impending change in the 'Millennium' announced by the 'Parthenon.'

'Why Mr. Argand should have given it up,' he said, 'passes my comprehension.'

'But I am afraid—at least, so the paper said,' put in Miss Dart, hastily, 'it is not a question of choice.'

'He parts with the proprietorship, no doubt, upon compulsion,' observed Mr. Rose, 'and precious hard up he must be to do it, considering it is his own offspring, and such a promising child; but whoever has bought it is, in my opinion, a fool not to have secured Argand's services as editor, at any price. It is like buying a racehorse without securing the only jockey who can ride him.'

Unpleasant as was the conversation to Miss Dart, she did not shrink from pursuing it. It struck her that from one so sagacious and conversant with affairs as her companion she might learn something that might be of advantage to Mr. Argand.

'The gentleman who has bought it——' she began.

'Bought it?' broke in the publisher, with eager interest. 'Then, it is absolutely disposed of, is it?'

'Well, no;' she hesitated, for she felt that she had no right to speak of the mortgage, 'it has not actually changed hands.'

'Now, look here, Miss Dart, we have done some business together which has been mutually satisfactory, I hope; now, perhaps, you can do me a good turn. Mr. Argand, as everybody knows, is uncommonly sweet upon you—I mean, of course, as an author's,' he hastily added, for poor Miss Dart had turned scarlet. 'Any word from you will have his ear. Just you tell him that there is a person of your acquaintance who will give him, if he will still continue to edit it—upon

terms, of course, to be agreed upon—a good round sum for the “Millennium.”

‘How much?’ inquired Miss Dart, meekly.

‘Well, upon my word, young lady, that’s coming to the point indeed. I can’t say the sum without looking into the books; but I’ll give him four years’ purchase for it. Only, that must buy *him*, too. If he’s a wise man, and things are as bad as they are said to be with him, he’ll just go through the Bankruptcy Court, and start again as fresh as a two-year-old.’

Here they reached the bank, where Mr. Rose transferred the sum agreed upon to Miss Dart, with many injunctions as to its safe custody. As he helped her into the cab he noticed that her limbs trembled.

‘You must not be nervous,’ he whispered slyly, ‘you are not like a railway truck, ticketed with the amount you carry. Besides, it is I who ought to be nervous. Be very, very careful of your precious life, for if anything should happen to you I should never forgive myself.’

As Mr. Rose took off his hat with an encouraging smile, Miss Dart felt that she was parting from a friend; if he was somewhat too wise in his generation to be numbered among the children of light, he had nevertheless something in common with them.

Lizzie drove straight home to the New Road to deposit her treasure in safety, and there, not a little to her relief, she found Aunt Jane. The sense of responsibility while action lay before her, she could bear; but now all was done that could be done, and, as she hoped, for the best, she felt the burden of it almost too much for her strength. With another, it is true, it could not be shared; but the consciousness of having a friend with her, and not being absolutely alone in that time of trouble and uncertainty, relieved her wonderfully.

‘How good of you it was to come by so early a train!’ she exclaimed, as she embraced the little widow. ‘I thought it was arranged that you were to wait for the afternoon express?’

‘How could I wait, my darling,’ was the affectionate reply, ‘when it was possible to meet you earlier? You may be sure it was no pleasure to me to stay at Casterton with the knowledge that you were alone—and—and in trouble, in London.’

‘But you wished good-bye to our dear friends at the Look-out, and explained to them why it was absolutely necessary I should have come away?’

'I did my best, my dear,' returned the widow, simply; 'but I am not good at explanation, and especially when I don't understand the thing myself. Mary, however, is so clever, that that didn't signify. She comprehended the whole matter at once, and said she would have done just the same had she been in your place.'

Here Aunt Jane stole a half-frightened look at her niece, who, however, was looking out of the window, with a thoughtful and preoccupied face. 'Dear Mary!' in tenderest accents, was all that she murmured in reply. Presently she inquired, after a long silence, 'Did you tell them about Battle Hill?'

'I did not mean to do so; but Mr. Leyden came in, and took it for granted that they knew it. If you had only seen their delight at the news, my darling! I do not believe, if the place had become their own, that it could have given them greater pleasure.'

'Alas, Aunt Jane, I have bad news for them, and for you! It must be years before we go to live at Casterton, if we ever do at all. I am so very, very sorry to have raised your hopes only to destroy them.'

'It is of no sort of consequence, my darling, so far as I am concerned; if we are content, we are happy; and I am always content with you—not, of course,' added Aunt Jane, hastily, 'that I am so foolish or so selfish as to imagine that I can always be with you.'

'There is only one thing that shall ever part us,' said Lizzie, quietly, 'and that is death.'

'You must not say that—you must not say that!' put in Aunt Jane, with a little sob. 'When I said I am content to be with you, I should have added that I should also be content, wherever I was, if I were assured you were happy.'

'You dear old thing!' whispered Lizzie, caressing her. 'It is just like you to say so; but it is also, I hope, like me to be as good as my word.'

Aunt and niece sat together at the open window—for the afternoon was extremely hot—exchanging only now and then a word with one another, but each busy with her own thoughts, until it was dinner time.

'I am going out this evening for an hour or so,' said Lizzie; 'but I shall not be far off.'

Aunt Jane understood at once that she was going to Harewood Square; doubtless, too, she guessed that she had already been there; but not a single question did she put upon the

matter. She had not many gifts, but she had that golden one of silence, which, in some circumstances, outweighs all others.

She did not even offer her escort when Lizzie rose to put on her bonnet, though her eyes anxiously watched the cab along the street, until it disappeared at the turning into the square.

Miss Argand was at home and alone, as she had promised to be; and though her face was weary and sad, it brightened up a little at the sight of her visitor.

'Let us come into the back drawing-room,' she said, 'it is cooler there.' It was also darker, and there were traces of recent tears upon the poor lady's cheeks, which she was unwilling should be seen. The heat had increased; every door and window in the two rooms was open; there was hardly a breath of air.

'I think we shall have thunder, presently,' she said, wearily; though, in truth, she cared nothing whether it thundered or not.

'Has anything happened since I saw you, my dear Miss Argand? Any change, I mean, in your brother's affairs?'

'None whatever, dear; we are only a little nearer the edge of the precipice, that is all. What makes me so wretched is that I cannot convince Felix that this trouble affects me on his account, and hardly on my own at all. He reproaches himself with having ruined me; whereas I had nothing to lose. It is his own little fortune that has gone, which he had a perfect right to spend in any way he chose, only the way he chose has been so unlucky.'

'Supposing the mortgage of 2,000*l.* on the "*Millennium*" to be paid off, he would still, as I understand, have *that* in his possession, would he not?'

'I suppose so. But what is the good of supposing, my dear?'

'Still, there is no harm in it,' said Lizzie, smiling. 'Even Euclid, who is not an imaginative writer, admits that much: "*Let it be granted,*" he says.'

'Miss Dart, dear Miss Dart,' interrupted Miss Argand, with agitation, 'you would never play with my feelings, I know. You have some good news for us.'

'I have got 2,000*l.*, at all events,' and with that she produced a little parcel from her hand-bag and laid it on the table.

'Great heavens! what a wretch I have been,' said Miss Argand, bitterly. 'I am a very wicked woman!'

Lizzie stared, as well she might.

'Go on, my dear, don't mind what I am saying. Who has obtained this money, and under what conditions? Everything will depend on that.'

'There are no conditions. It is my own money: now it is your brother's,' and she pushed the parcel to her across the table.

'*Your* money!' cried Miss Argand. 'Alas! then it is of no use; he will never, never take it. And it is I, fool that I am, who have prevented it. Listen to me, you dear good girl, and forgive me, if you can.'

Nevertheless, for a moment or two she did not speak; but like one who is contending with acute physical pain, pressed her open hands against her face, and rocked herself to and fro.

'Felix and I have lived together all our lives,' she began. 'At first, when we were both left orphans, and he was very young, I believe I did my best as an elder sister by him. I would have done more, if I could, for he was and is dearer to me than all the world beside; what I did do was not much—yet he has never forgotten it. After a few years, our positions became reversed; and since then he has been my protector and the provider of all my needs. My influence over him has, however, never ceased. If I had exerted it wisely, he would this day be the happiest of men; but my selfishness and want of sympathy have ruined him.'

'You do yourself wrong, Miss Argand,' said Lizzie, in grave but tender tones. 'Whatever may have been wanting in you, it was not want of sympathy; and whatever mistake you may have committed, it was, as you thought, for his benefit.'

Miss Argand shook her head. 'No, dear; I had sympathy with his work, sympathy even with his ambition; but where the true happiness of his heart was concerned, I had none; his dearest wishes were counter to my own, and, therefore, I opposed them. I tried to persuade myself that I was acting for his good, I know now that I was doing it for my own gratification; my motive was not love, but jealousy.'

Here the thunder began to peal, though from a cloudless sky, and the speaker paused, as though to listen to it. The two women sat together for a little in silence, each looking

before her thoughtfully, but with eyes averted from the other. There was no occasion for either to read the other's face ; for the very thought of her companion's heart was known to her.

‘ When he first spoke to me of your writings, Lizzie,’ continued Miss Argand, ‘ I felt almost as interested in you as he did himself ; I had a genuine admiration for your genius ; I looked forward with pleasure to carrying out his wish that I should be of friendly service to you. Until I saw you, I forget now what sort of a picture I had made of you in my mind ; but it was something very unlike yourself. When I beheld you, young and beautiful, and called to mind the terms in which my brother had spoken of the qualities of your mind, I feared, and justly, the effect you would produce upon him. I called upon you with the kindest intentions, and you did nothing to alter them, yet when I left your presence it was as a rival and as an enemy. I even persuaded myself that you were an adventuress, from whose charms it behoved me to guard my brother by all means in my power. You may have noticed, perhaps, how coldly I received you ; how rarely I invited you to our house ; and how few were the opportunities I gave you of being alone with Felix. In the end, I should have failed, of course ; but if I had assisted him, as I should have done from the beginning, all would yet have gone well.’ Lizzie was about to speak, but her companion stopped her. ‘ I want no confession from your lips, my dear ; nothing that you could say could alter my convictions as to the feelings you entertained for Felix. The eyes of Jealousy are even keener than those of Love ; and it is for me to confess, and not for you. I say that in those early days, but for my secret opposition and selfish conduct, two hearts would have been made happy ; and all that I could do to hinder it would have been useless long before this, but for the change that took place in my brother's means. It may seem incredible to you, but at first our common misfortune was welcome to me—because, from what I knew of him, I knew it would prevent him declaring his love. Thanks to me, while he was prosperous he delayed to do so ; and now that he is in adversity his lips are sealed for ever. Even if you had been twice as poor as once you were, he would not ask you to share his ruin ; but, being prosperous and famous, and with a fortune before you, it is out of the question that he should think of you otherwise than as something beyond his reach, and lost to him for ever.

It is I that have done it! It is I that have wrecked his life! Oh! Lizzie, Lizzie, forgive me!

'I have nothing to forgive, Miss Argand,' said Lizzie, gently. 'I do not wonder that you were unwilling that Felix Argand should throw himself away upon a girl like me.'

'Like you? There is none like you! I know it now, too late, too late! He will never take that money from your hands, never, never!'

'It is in my hands no longer,' was the quiet reply. 'Nor need he know that it has ever been in them. Hush! I heard the front door close.'

'No. It was the thunder. Felix will not be home for hours. He comes home late. He walks about the streets to tire himself out, to get the sleep that anxiety denies him. From whom could we persuade him that this money comes, unless from you? Who is there but yourself who would be so generous?'

'There is no generosity about it. There are many persons—Mr. Rose, the publisher, for one—who would advance the sum, and more, upon the security of the "Millennium," if only Mr. Argand would consent to remain its editor. He has been too hasty in this matter, and too hopeless, and too doubtful of his great gifts and reputation.'

'I believe that is true,' murmured the other.

'Let him take it, then, from Mr. Rose, if he is too proud to take it from me. There will be no obligation on his side, you may assure him; it is only I who will be the loser. I had promised myself a great pleasure; but that is over' (her voice broke down). 'I think I will go home.'

She rose, but paused, with a frightened look on her face; and, following the direction of her eyes, Miss Argand beheld a form standing in the doorway between the two rooms.

'It is Felix!' she cried out.

'Yes, it is I,' he answered, in a hoarse voice. 'I did not know that any one was here; I have heard something that was not meant for my ears. Miss Dart—'

'Call her Lizzie! Call her Lizzie! She loves you, Felix!' exclaimed Miss Argand, wildly.

It mattered not what he called her; for Lizzie, overcome with emotion, and fatigue, and terror, had fallen forward in a dead faint, and he had but just time to catch her in his arms.

CHAPTER XLVIII

TELLING THE NEWS.

WHATEVER cause Miss Argand had to reproach herself for what she had done of *malice prepense* in separating two fond hearts, she had, in the impulse of the moment, made amends for it. When a gentleman has been informed that the object of his affection loves him, and finds her in his arms, all explanation becomes mere surplusage. The fact of her being in a dead faint by no means detracts from the satisfactoriness of the situation. He lingers (in a manner that would never be permitted at sea) over the operation of bringing her to, and the less adroit he is at it, the more cause he has to congratulate himself. When she comes to herself, he is pretty confident that she will come to *him*; and so, in fact, it turned out in the present case. When the next flash of lightning searched the room in its swift but comprehensive fashion, it found the editor and his contributor sitting hand-in-hand alone together—Miss Argand having very judiciously withdrawn herself directly there was no further need of her services—in the apparent enjoyment of an entire mutual understanding. Nevertheless, there were certain details to be inquired into. What was that great pleasure, for example, Felix had accidentally heard his Lizzie say that she had promised herself, but which was denied to her, as it appeared, through some fault of his? And what was he to take from Mr. Rose which he was too proud to take from her?

‘It was only a little parcel, which Miss Argand had got in her possession,’ she replied.

‘Some MS., I suppose,’ he said, not indifferently—very far from indifferently—but without the slightest interest in the question; he had put it, in fact, only with the object of hearing her talk, as we give sugar to a canary to make it sing.

‘Not MS.,’ she said, ‘print—or rather, engravings.’

‘A little present,’ he murmured, ‘no doubt, to smooth the way. I have just found a communication from Mr. Rose upon my study table which may have a considerable influence upon my unhappy fortunes, and which, indeed, has emboldened me to declare what, however great had been the temptation, it would otherwise have behoved me to conceal. Dear Lizzie,

I am no longer a penniless man, and have even a prospect before me, such as I had not an hour ago, of at least a competent income. Mr. Rose has offered to purchase the "Millennium" on very liberal terms, and to retain me as its editor at a handsome salary.'

'He has lost no time in that little transaction,' thought Lizzie to herself, with a secret smile; but what she said was, 'That is very nice.'

'Even as matters stand, however, and though I were less unworthy of you in all other ways, I am a very, very bad match for you, my dear girl.'

'Indeed!' remarked Lizzie, and never was that lukewarm word more charmingly expressed; it was a really exquisite combination of interest and scepticism, and seemed to invite any amount of information of the same amazing and incredible nature.

'Still,' continued Mr. Argand, modestly, 'I am not the pauper I thought I was; or, I should rather say, that as a literary commodity (though infinitely less valuable than a popular author like Mr. John Javelin) I fetch more in the market than I ever ventured to suspect.'

'You are placed, in fact, in the same position as you were before, except that you have exchanged mortgagees?'

'Well, not exactly, my darling,' sighed Mr. Argand; 'you don't quite understand the matter.'

'I think I do, sir. The idea of you contradicting me at such a very early stage as this!'

'Indeed, my dear Lizzie, I only wish you were right; but the fact is, I shall exchange, not mortgagees, but the position of a proprietor for that of an editor. My poor "Millennium" will pass out of my possession, though not out of my hands, for good and all.'

'But if you were to pay off the present mortgage, would not that be better than selling?'

'Why, of course, it would; only unfortunately I have not got the money. To be sure, I might have borrowed it, but I have been so troubled and worried by other things that I did not think of that plan in time.'

'If you could, however, effect such an arrangement with any one, you would—supposing the "Millennium" kept its value—be under no obligation to him?'

'None whatever, since I should, of course, pay a good rate of interest for the advance.'

‘Very good; then behold your new mortgagee. Here is the money with which to pay off the old one.’

‘The money! You must be mad, Lizzie. I am a little out of my mind myself; but then I have something to be mad about: there is nothing to set *your* fine brain in a ferment with happiness. That you are a fortune to me I am well convinced; you may be even worth a great deal to the publishers; but that even “The Usher” should have produced you 2,000*l*. I must really decline to believe.’

‘It seems to me that you are very rude, Felix; and again I say it is very early to be rude,’ said Lizzie, with the most delicious little pout. ‘What right have you to under-estimate the worth of my novel, sir? When you thought it was somebody else’s you praised it enough; but that was because you had got it for your own magazine, I suppose.’

‘Oh, dear, dear! here is a termagant!’

‘And there is a sceptic. I don’t believe your name is Felix: I believe it’s Thomas. Perhaps you will open that parcel and count those notes.’

‘Oh, Lizzie! is it really true? What pains and trouble have you not undergone for my sake! You must have moved heaven and earth to get all this money.’

‘I did move a publisher,’ admitted Lizzie, ruefully. ‘However, there it is.’

‘And do you really suppose that I am going to take it?’

‘That depends upon whether you are going to take *me*—which I understood was your intention. If not, and you leave me to wear the willow, then, even as a deserted mortgagee, I have your own word for it that I shall put you under no obligation.’

‘What have I done to deserve such a woman as this?’ murmured Felix Argand.

‘Heaps of misdemeanours. In the first place, you lost your temper because I did not choose you to know that I had written a novel.’

‘Lizzie, I see it all now; you concealed its authorship in order—since you had heard that I was in difficulties—to let the “Millennium” have it at a cheap rate. You are certainly the most self-sacrificing of mortals.’

‘That is not Mr. Rose’s view of my character, I do assure you.’

‘Never mind Mr. Rose just now, my pet, my darling!’ murmured Felix, caressingly. ‘How shall I find a name

endearing enough, and which has not been spoilt by ignoble use, by which to call you ? ’

‘ Call me your mortgagee,’ suggested Lizzie, laughing. ‘ That will have the merit both of truth and originality. I don’t suppose any one ever fell in love with his mortgagee before. Seriously, my dear Felix, I shall not feel free to be happy with you till you have got rid of all your embarrassments.’

‘ I don’t care twopence for my embarrassments,’ said Felix, snapping his fingers. The observation was philosophic enough ; but the speaker had anything but the appearance of a philosopher. He looked so bright and gay that he might have been the editor of ‘ Punch ’ rather than of the ‘ Millennium.’ He had suddenly grown ten years younger.

‘ It is fortunate that one of us, at least, has a turn for practical matters,’ remarked Lizzie, with great gravity.

‘ But not when we are alone together for the first time, like this,’ pleaded her lover, tenderly.

‘ It would only be charitable to remember that your sister is also alone,’ observed Lizzie—not, however, immediately ; there was an ‘ interval allowed for refreshment.’ ‘ I should never forgive myself if I caused you to neglect her.’

‘ You will never cause me to do anything but what is kind and affectionate,’ murmured Felix, more tenderly than ever.

‘ Yes ; but I don’t mean what is affectionate to *me*, sir—— How terribly it thunders ! ’

‘ I hear only your sweet voice. Joanna likes nothing so much as listening to thunder—quite alone.’

By way of comment to this audacious speech, there was here a most demonstrative rattle at the outer door, followed by a warning cough, a rustling of silk, and then the appearance of Miss Argand herself. ‘ I am very sorry,’ said she, ‘ to interrupt any conversation upon private business—but the fact is, I dare not stay by myself any longer. I thought that last clap would have split the house ! ’

‘ What *does* it signify ? ’ exclaimed Felix, peevishly. ‘ We have only got it for five weeks more.’

‘ He is quite irrational, and not at all accountable for what he says, Miss Argand,’ explained Lizzie, apologetically.

‘ And I don’t at all wonder at it ; only, you must never again call me Miss Argand, my dear.’ She held out her arms, and Lizzie flew into them. ‘ Has he forgiven me, my darling, as you have ? ’ she whispered.

‘He has no remembrance of anything but your love and devotion to him,’ was the confident reply.

The tears came into Joanna’s eyes.

‘Felix, dear Felix, I congratulate you with all my heart!’

The brother and sister embraced tenderly, and then——

‘What are you about, Felix?’ remonstrated Joanna. ‘You have no right to be congratulating *her*.’

‘Yes, I have—on having found a sister,’ explained Felix.

‘He may be irrational, but he retains his presence of mind,’ remarked Joanna, amid great laughter.

It is probable that three such happy people were not to be found that night in District W.

By some mistake—which, as it turned out, was a fortunate one—the gentleman from Melbourne had not kept his appointment; so that Mr. Argand had entered into no compact with him. The happy pair talked of their future, which circumstances had so brightly altered; and the hours vanished on golden wings. Suddenly, Lizzie started up with a remorseful cry. ‘I have quite forgotten dear Aunt Jane!’ she exclaimed. ‘How frightened she will be at my being so late!’

They tried to comfort her, though not to stop her; for it was evident that she was much distressed. ‘If I have given her a moment’s pain,’ she cried, ‘I am the wickedest of women!’

‘But it’s wicked of you to want to leave me!’ urged the enamoured one.

‘Lizzie is quite right,’ said Joanna. ‘She will not make the worse wife to you, Felix, because, even when you are by her side, she thinks of one to whom she owes both love and duty.’

‘Nor will he make the worse husband, Joanna, because he does, and will always do, the like,’ said Lizzie, quickly.

‘That was very prettily said, my dear; but how sharp you are already at defending him! I thought you had cut my nose off. Now, I shouldn’t wonder if Felix saw you home.’

Felix did see her home. As she had expected, the lights showed through the windows of the sitting-room—a proof that her aunt was keeping vigil for her. ‘Will you not come up, Felix?’ she said, hesitatingly, as they stood at the door. He did not think it necessary to reply in words. She led the way, a few steps before him, lest Aunt Jane, unexpectant of callers, should have laid aside her cap, without which mortal man had not beheld her for twenty years.

'I hope I have not frightened you, Aunt Jane, by being so late?'

'Not the least in the world,' returned that lady, with a quiet smile.

'You will be surprised to hear that I have brought you a gentleman visitor.'

'I am not at all surprised, my dear,' was the unexpected rejoinder. And the next moment Mr. Argand and the little widow were shaking hands together as though they would shake each other's arms off. Independently of the tears that stood in her kind eyes, it was easy to see that she thoroughly comprehended the whole situation.

'And how did you ever come to guess our secret?' asked Lizzie, after her aunt had tenderly embraced and congratulated her.

'I did not guess it, my dear. I am too old and too stupid; but a little bird informed me of it this morning.'

'But we didn't know it ourselves until this evening.'

'Yes, you did; only you hadn't told it to one another. When that horrid paragraph in the "Parthenon" made you jump up and run off to the railway—for she walked every step of the way, Mr. Argand—I said to myself, this is friendship indeed! But when I told Mary what had happened, she had a much better explanation to offer. She is in love herself, you see—though, poor dear, she will never wear the orange-flower—and jumped at once to the right conclusion. "You may be quite certain," she said, "that Lizzie is in love with Mr. Argand"; while as to Mr. Argand being in love with you, Lizzie,' added Aunt Jane, naïvely, 'why, how could it be otherwise?'

'A very just observation,' observed Felix, gravely.

'Well, under the circumstances, my dear, I made up my mind not to expect you home to-night before I saw you; and when I did see you it did not astonish me to find who was your companion.'

'You are like the dear old travelling dervish that sums up the corroborative evidence in the Eastern tales, to prove that the lost camel has only one eye,' said Lizzie, laughing; 'and you must be as tired, too, with your unaccustomed journey and your troubles about my poor self, as any dervish.'

Felix took the hint at once, and (after certain familiar formalities) his leave.

'He is a good kind man, Lizzie,' was Aunt Jane's comment

upon him, 'and as worthy of you as any man is likely to be. Now, tell me, my darling, all about it.'

There were reasons that made this a difficult task, for Lizzie, of course, wished to conceal that she had made any sacrifice for Mr. Argand. But, considering what Aunt Jane had been to her, and also that she had already had cause to complain of being denied her confidence, she felt compelled to narrate the whole transaction with Mr. Rose. She had her reward, for the good widow, while warmly appreciating its revelation, did not understand one word of the matter.

'I am very stupid, I know, my dear; but though I see what an excellent arrangement has been made for every one, I don't comprehend how you have managed to change paper, which is not bank notes, and which has not even been written upon, into gold!'

'Well, in a word, my dear, I've mortgaged myself. It sounds like an accident, doesn't it? But I assure you, it's a most satisfactory arrangement.'

'You dear, clever creature! That I'm sure it is, or you would never have made it.'

CHAPTER XLIX.

AT THE DUCHESS'S.

BEFORE the week was over, Lizzie had insured her life, and the policy was lodged in Mr. Rose's hands, without any one belonging to her suspecting anything of the matter.

She knew that Aunt Jane's secrecy as to her having mortgaged herself would be inviolable, because she never talked about anything she did not understand; and it immensely increased the pleasure of having freed her lover from his embarrassments at her own cost, that he was unaware of the circumstance. She would have to work, it was true, and to work harder than she would otherwise have done; but work for one we love, even if we do not delight in the work itself—as she did—is sweetest toil. She had the utmost confidence in her own powers, and to judge by the verdict of the world, it was not misplaced. Mr. Rose had lost no time in making use of the privilege for which he had stipulated of making known the authorship of 'The Usher'; and in a few

days her name was in the mouths of all who take an interest in such matters, and of that still larger community who pretend to take it. There was not a newspaper of any standing which had not some reference to her, with more or less eulogistic reference to her marvellous gifts. Her essays were criticised anew and read—or attempted to be read—by the light of her novel. Characteristic touches were discovered in both, which she herself would have been at a loss to recognise, had her attention been drawn to them. But, while by no means contemptuous of praise, she shrank, with something more than dislike, from all public prominence. Acting on Mr. Argand's advice, which chimed in with her natural instincts in the matter, she read no criticisms on herself, whether favourable or otherwise.

'The one,' he said, 'will only tickle your vanity, and the other wound your *amour-propre*.'

For there were, of course, adverse criticisms; her success had been so complete and immediate that she was already in the position of a writer of established reputation, whom all the poisoned darts (and even stink-pots) of envy and detraction are attracted, as by some natural law of gravity. Worse than these, though even more contemptible, were the personal observations in which certain journals did not hesitate to indulge. Some of them were even at the pains to compile—in different styles, and according to their own taste and fancy—her biography. In one of these the circumstance of her having been so long mistaken for one of the male sex was ascribed to a way she had, in common with a great female novelist in France, of going about in men's clothes. In another she was the daughter of an Archbishop (who had secretly married beneath him), and had taken to light literature and pronounced opinions in revenge for his declining to acknowledge her as his legitimate offspring.

These flights of fancy were occasionally mingled with infinitesimal grains of truth. One journal described her as a governess who had charmed the son of the house, who had, in consequence, been discarded by his father; her pen now maintained her husband—unhappily, a *mauvais sujet*, who spent her magnificent earnings in every description of dissipation. Another was compelled, by a sense of public duty, to give the statement (which it had, however, received upon the best authority) for what it was worth, that neither the essays nor the novel, of which so much was talked, were her own

composition, but had been written by her old schoolmaster, an indigent antiquary who, in total ignorance of their literary value, had sold them to her for five-and-twenty shillings the lot. In consequence of this interesting information, old schoolmasters and others sprang up like mushrooms in various places in the country, claiming their rights, and appealing to a credulous public for a few shillings to keep life and soul together in genius wronged.

All this rubbish, however, only tended to raise higher and higher the flame of her notoriety.

The applications for autographs, for photographs, for 'a few words in your own handwriting, expressing a sentiment,' or for 'a quotation from your admirable works,' flowed in unceasingly; invitations to dinners, to afternoon teas, and even to breakfasts, from the most high-placed Dianas—lion-huntresses of the first rank—rained in upon her by every post. Not only were all the proprietors of literary menageries in town eager to add her to their collection, but even those of the provinces. These latter, indeed, to whom the tedium of their existence had probably begotten a certain desperation, were more audacious and importunate than the others. She was invited to half-a-dozen country seats by as many female magnates, whose apology for addressing her must be found (they said) in the fact that, in the authoress of 'The Usher,' they recognised, not only a genius—which, indeed, all the world acknowledged—but, in the highest and noblest sense, a friend.

If their tributes of respect did not impress Miss Elizabeth Dart quite so deeply as, in some cases, they were obviously expected to do, they afforded her very considerable amusement. As her address was unknown, they were all addressed to her, to be forwarded by the editor of the 'Millennium,' who most bitterly complained of the postage. It was about the only thing, in those days, that Felix Argand had to complain of. Lizzie's love had renewed for him, not, indeed, his youth—for he was still comparatively a young man—but that light-hearted gaiety which fails and fades, on our road through middle life, as though the coming stupor of old age, beheld from afar, had palsied us with its prospect.

One day, with eyes that twinkled with fun, he brought a letter to her of the kind which usually came in packets.

It was an envelope, containing a dinner card, from the Dowager Duchess of Doldrum.

'It is very kind of her,' said Lizzie, rather coldly; 'but I don't see why it should not have been forwarded with the others.'

The idea of his having made an exception in favour of her Grace was very disagreeable to her. She exceedingly resented the notion of patronage under any circumstances, and that this example of it should have had the tacit recommendation of her Felix was particularly distasteful.

'My dear, she is a Duchess,' remonstrated Felix, wickedly. It was very seldom that he could get 'a rise' out of Lizzie, whose sense of humour was, indeed, much stronger than his own, and he enjoyed his opportunity immensely.

'At all events, I have not the honour of her acquaintance,' was the frigid reply.

'That is why she seeks it, I suppose. I did not bring her invitation "with the others," as you call them, because she herself enjoined me to place it in your hands.'

'Oh, she is a friend of your own, is she?' exclaimed Lizzie, with an air of relief.

'There is as much friendship between us as is possible between persons of such different positions in life. I am sometimes asked to "at-homes" at Doldrum House. We are not absolutely confidential, though she sometimes bows to me quite sweetly in the Park when there is no one looking.'

'You are going yourself, however, I suppose, to this dinner?'

'I? Certainly not. There is a reception in the evening, however, to which I am invited—you must remember, my darling' (for Lizzie looked very much ruffled), 'that her Grace is quite unaware of our engagement.'

'Does she ask me, then, to come alone?'

'No; she has very kindly included Joanna in the invitation. I have another card here, which I am to give her if you accept, but not otherwise.'

'Then I consider this lady exceedingly impertinent.'

'My dear, she is a Duchess.'

'I shall certainly not go, Felix.'

'Then I think you will make a mistake, my love. In my opinion, you should never lose an opportunity of a new experience.'

'Copy!' exclaimed Lizzie, with indignation. 'I am not a newspaper reporter. If I went on those grounds, I should indeed be a fitting guest for such a hostess.'

'My dear Lizzie, do be reasonable. There is, in the first place, no obligation in the matter; or, if any, it lies on her Grace's side. If her own admiration for genius is not very genuine, you will meet others at her house of another calibre. I don't pretend that it will be a new world to you. A palace, a host of servants, and an interminable dinner do not, as is too commonly supposed, constitute a Paradise; the company that is, *par excellence*, termed brilliant, is often, no doubt, exceedingly dull; but still, it will be an experience to meet them. The only commoner besides Joanna and yourself will probably be Sir David Dredge, for I met him in the street just now, and he told me he was going.'

'Sir David Dredge—is that the doctor?'

'Yes; he has just been made a Baronet: a very quaint old fellow, one of the few men in his profession who takes a real interest in literature. If you had heard him when he raved about "The Usher" I am sure you would like to meet him,' added Felix, slyly.

'I think I'll go,' observed Lizzie, thoughtfully.

Felix stared at her, amazed.

'Yes, there is much in what you have urged; and I don't mind being dazzled, just for once. But do you think Joanna will go?'

'To dinner at Doldrum House? With peas in her shoes, if that was obligatory. In matters of social rank, all women——' He hesitated, then stopped abruptly.

'Yes? You were about to make an observation,' observed Lizzie, sweetly.

'No, an exception. I was about to say that all the women I have ever met, except yourself, are more or less weak about titles. Even titled women themselves are weak about them. I know a Countess who always speaks of her own husband—it sounds like a sarcasm, for she henpecks him—as "My Lord."'

'Well, now you will have to make no exception, even of me, Felix; for I am going to Doldrum House, you see, after all.'

Accordingly, at the appointed day, to Doldrum House the two ladies went. The Duchess was a good woman, in her way; good-tempered, unless crossed by anybody; homely at heart, in spite of the pomp that surrounded her; and with a determination of spirit that was very highly spoken of by those who did not suffer from it. Her manner was natural—as it is

not difficult for people's manner to be who have everything their own way—and was much admired. There were many persons of high rank at the banquet; but Miss Dart was the guest of the evening, and her hostess called her 'my dear.'

'You shall sit next to whom you please,' she whispered to her while they were in the drawing-room. 'Dredge, eh? (I am sorry to say she ignored the new Baronet's title.) 'You have got nothing the matter with your spine, I hope, that you want to talk to *him* about. However, Dredge it shall be.' And the places at table were arranged accordingly.

Nothing was lost, we may be sure, upon Elizabeth Dart (except some of the entrées). She had the eye of a hawk, without its appetite; but the person who most attracted her attention was her next neighbour.

He was a stout man, with a fine head and a very soft voice. There were members of his profession, less distinguished, who maintained that it was not always so very soft; but, in speaking to Lizzie, it sounded like a snowfall. He spoke of her works with an intelligent enthusiasm which put it beyond question that he had really read them.

'Is the original of your delightful "Bit of Old England" a State secret?' he inquired.

'Not from you,' she answered sweetly. 'It is Casterton.'

He made a note of the name upon his shirt cuff. 'I shall go there this autumn without fail,' he said.

'If you do,' she replied, gravely, 'I want you to do me a great service, Sir David.'

'Consider it as already done, Miss Dart,' was the gallant reply.

'I have a dear young friend there—one Matthew Meyrick—who is dying of some spinal complaint, which he ought not to die of.'

'Who says that?'

'Dr. Dalling, of Downshire. He told me there was one man in England who could cure him, and only one—Dr. Dredge.'

'Did he now?' The physician leant back in his chair, with an air of pleased reminiscence. 'I remember Dalling. We were students together at Guy's. A man of sense and judgment. Unhappily, I have made a solemn vow and covenant with myself never to see a patient out of London.'

'Everybody knows that, Sir David; and the country is jealous of the town in consequence.'

'Miss Dart, I have found out what I should never have

suspected from your behaviour here—for never did I see a young lady so much at ease in the social Zion. You are a flatterer.'

'No, Sir David; if I seem to be so, it is only because I admire your noble profession above all others, and recognise the head of it in yourself.'

'Cannot this poet of yours come up to town, and consult me, like other people?' inquired the doctor, with a pretence of irritation.

'No. I have forgotten to give him what will be the very best passport to your help. He is very poor.'

'For the first time in my life, Miss Dart, I may truly say that I am sorry for the resolution I have made, and which I cannot break—even for your sake; if it was known that I visited this gentleman in the country professionally——'

'I wouldn't ask you to do such a thing for worlds!' interrupted Miss Dart, simply. 'You must visit him as a friend, of course, and cure him for nothing.'

'I never thought of that!' exclaimed the physician; and indeed, it was probable that the idea had all the attraction of novelty for him. It was said of Sir David that, on being appealed to, on a certain occasion which seemed to demand some abatement, to reduce a fee in three figures, he had magnanimously replied, 'I will make it pounds instead of guineas'; but, as a rule, he surpassed Shylock by demanding more than his pound. There were plenty of unfashionable physicians, he used to say, who were quite justified in prescribing gratuitously; but, for his part, his fees were a part of his reputation, and he couldn't afford it. It was the first time for a quarter of a century that he had made an exception to this admirable rule. He flattered himself he was doing it solely to oblige a young woman of genius, of whom all the town was talking; he was quite unaware that, like the trout à la Doldrum he had been just discussing, he had been tickled and landed.

When Miss Dart took her leave of her hostess that night, 'I have enjoyed your company very much, my dear,' said the Duchess, an inversion of the usual forms of hospitality which amused her guest immensely. She, too, had good reason to be satisfied with her entertainment at Doldrum House, for she had succeeded beyond her expectations in attaining the object which alone had attracted her thither.

CHAPTER L.

STRUCK DOWN.

THERE are two things—accident and illness—which, though common enough in human life, are always more or less left out of our calculations. We see them happening on all sides to our friends, we know that any day they may happen to ourselves, and we may even make such feeble provision against them as is possible. But it is our secret hope that we shall ourselves escape these misfortunes, to which, after all, flesh is not necessarily the heir, but only a possible legatee. When they do happen, they fall on one class with comparative lightness; and on another, with terrific force. Those who have capital, on the interest of which they live, and who, dying, can bequeath it to their children, are out of reach of the worst effect of these calamities; they may be tortured, they may be crippled, but there is no necessity for the maimed limbs to work, for the fevered brain to think for others; their dear ones are materially no worse off than they were in consequence of the blow that has been dealt to themselves. It is for the bread-winner that accident and illness have the gravest and most crushing consequences. To be paralysed, and yet to feel the necessity for exertion, is the most distressing position in which poor human nature can be placed. The intense egotism of philosophy avails us nothing under such circumstances; nay, even the resignation born of religion is powerless to console us, since our unavailing tears fall not for ourselves only, but for others.

Were we always looking from side to side for these misfortunes, like one who treads a crowded crossing, life would be unendurable; but, at the same time, the unexpectedness of their occurrence adds to the force of the shock. To-day, the lawyer, the man of business, or the author, may be said to be more or less prosperous; to-morrow, he lies with broken bones or broken health; and, above all, with the terrible consciousness of every-day vanishing means. Of the three, the author is in the worst case, since he has no partner to carry on his trade, and no 'good-will' to dispose of; both principal and income, save under circumstances which are only too exceptional, are gone together.

For some little time Elizabeth Dart had experienced such

prosperity as rarely falls to the lot of man, and still more rarely to that of woman. She possessed a great and ever-widening reputation; a future of unexampled brilliancy, in the case of one of her age and sex, lay before her, and of this she felt assured; she had no doubt of her own powers; she was conscious that she had only just begun to draw upon resources that were practically without limit. All that was brightest, and much that was best in society, were eager for her company under their own roof; while an invitation from herself was a social distinction. She had temporarily taken a small but pretty house in Kilburn, with a charming garden, which was Aunt Jane's paradise. Mr. Argand had arranged with his landlord to retain possession of his house in Harewood Square, so that the two families (if they could be called such) were still neighbours. It need scarcely be said that they saw a great deal of one another. They might be said, indeed, to possess in common a town house and a country house; but, on account of the time of year—for it was still early autumn—they were more often at the latter than the former. Mr. Argand and Lizzie were to be married at Christmas; the bridegroom would have preferred an earlier date, but she had reasons, known only to herself, for deferring his felicity to the end of the year. She wished to come to him free from debt. Until she had finished her new book, and had thereby discharged her obligation to Mr. Rose, she felt that she had not leisure to be happy. Their engagement, however, was announced, and increased the interest which was felt in her. It was universally agreed that so fitting a match gave quite a colour to the old belief (so fast, alas! dying out) that marriages are made in heaven. Felix Argand had a striking individuality of his own, and was widely known and deservedly popular. While every one congratulated him, a few who knew him well congratulated her; and it was their felicitations, we may be sure, which gave the most pleasure. Happy in herself, in her lover, in her surroundings of all kinds, her cup of pleasure had been filled to the brim by good news from Casterton. The day after meeting Sir David at Doldrum House she had sent him a copy of Matthew's poems, with a letter reminding him of his promise; and the physician had been as good as his word. He had spent most of the short holiday he allowed himself at Casterton, and made great friends with the invalid, visiting him almost daily.

'Your young friend,' he wrote, confidentially, to Miss Dart, from the Welcome, 'interests me, you will be pleased to hear,

more than his malady. There are, in my opinion, no insuperable difficulties, such as we doctors love, connected with it. I cannot say that he has been treated for it improperly, for he has not been treated at all. Time and the chapter of accidents are excellent things to trust to; but it is hard on science to ignore her powers and despise her assistance altogether. To leave everything to Nature is the simplest of remedies; but (strictly between ourselves) she is not always bent on remedy. If she has any good intentions, it is, on the other hand, well to supplement them a little. This is what I hope I have done. There are certain resemblances in the case in question to a serious, perhaps incurable, form of myelitis; but I have reason to hope that it will turn out mere spinal congestion, in which there lies always hope. If the treatment I have suggested be persevered in, I should not be surprised, a twelvemonth hence, to see M. M. (excuse a literary style which smacks of the "Lancet") bestriding a steed of flesh and blood as easily as he now mounts his Pegasus. He has thrown up the sponge too easily. If a carriage with C-springs and a yacht were at his disposal, his cure would doubtless be accelerated; but, even as matters are, you have good cause for congratulation. Do not thank me, however, my dear Miss Dart, till we are out of the wood; nor, indeed, even then—for I assure you, without affectation, that the obligation will be on my side. The society of your young friend has doubled my enjoyment of this beautiful spot. No wonder that it inspires genius. I don't say a word about Miss Mary, from which you will draw, I know, the wickedest conclusions. When I reflect that I am doing my best to get a hated rival upon his legs again, I assure you I plume myself not a little upon such chivalrous conduct.

From subsequent bulletins, after Sir David had left Caster-ton, it was plain that an improvement in Matthew's condition had commenced.

One morning Elizabeth Dart sat down as usual to her daily task, and found herself unable to pursue it. Her head seemed to spin round, and she found it impossible to concentrate her thoughts; when, with effort, she had written down a word or two, she was in doubt as to whether they were spelt aright. There are few veterans of the pen to whom these symptoms have not occasionally occurred; but they alarmed her exceedingly. If the attack had been more violent, it would in some respects have been better for her, for she would then have been less conscious of her shortcoming; as it was, she

recognised, not only the difficulty of conception, but the platitudes that came of it. This circumstance would not have been a portent to some writers; but she had never written platitudes. Any person of ordinary common-sense would, under such circumstances, have desisted from their occupation, but the more obstacles Nature interposed the more resolute she became to overcome them. It was as though, finding her mind a blank, she felt a necessity for supplying it with ideas; but, unhappily, they would not come. Her brain, like a nervous horse whom its rider compels again and again to face some object of its apprehension, became more and more recalcitrant. 'If I once suffer myself,' was her reflection, 'to imagine myself unequal to my daily task, all will be over with me: I shall become like those spiritless Bohemians who never wrote "unless they were in the humour" or could not otherwise obtain a glass of liquor.' The only thought she could entertain with clearness, and which came without invitation, was connected with her creditor, Mr. Rose. She had only written half the novel for which he paid her in advance; and if it was never to be finished she might just as well have written none of it. A small thing it may be said to disturb so great a mind, a trouble both in nature and extent contemptible enough to any one of even moderate means. There have been geniuses even, like herself, who would have regarded it with the most philosophic equanimity, but her nature was not only exceptionally sensitive, but singularly simple and honest.

It was her habit to be quite alone while employed in composition: she could not endure interruption of any kind; but she made an exception in favour of Aunt Jane, who would come into her room half-a-dozen times in the morning 'to see'—very literally, for she never spoke—'to see how her dear girl was getting on.' On such occasions Lizzie would always smile and nod, and the little widow, much refreshed by these manifestations, would retire as she came, noiselessly as a cat. This morning, when she looked in, there was no smile for her: her niece, pen in hand, was staring straight before her like a sphinx. Aunt Jane, who had a certain superstitious reverence for Lizzie while at her desk, would probably have made no observation, imagining the attitude to be only a new form of inspiration, but for the fact of perceiving the MS. book in which her niece always wrote, upon the floor.

‘Why, my darling, you’ve dropped your book.’

‘It doesn’t matter,’ was the astounding reply. Even the Sibyl had a book (though it turned out at last to be a very little one), and it seemed incredible to Aunt Jane, clever as Lizzie was, that she should be able to write in the air as though it were paper. There was something, too, strange and distraught in Lizzie’s tones which alarmed her.

‘You are not well, my child; you do not look like yourself.’

‘I am not myself,’ sighed Lizzie, dropping the pen and bursting into tears.

In half an hour she was lying unconscious in her bed. The nearest doctor was sent for. His face at first was grave; but cleared, and became even cheerful after a conversation with Mr. Argand, who, with his sister, had been summoned at once. It was a case of overwork, he pronounced; the brain had been taxed too heavily.

‘I do not think so,’ said Mr. Argand, who was not unacquainted with that subject, and knew the ease with which Lizzie did her work.

‘Her nervous centres are disorganised,’ observed the doctor, professionally, plunging out of the other’s depth.

For days Lizzie lay in a high fever, not raving, but talking incessantly to herself. It was sad, indeed, for those who loved her, and had been used to her bright and thoughtful utterances, to listen to those bald, disjointed scraps: a thing quite as piteous in its way as though her physical beauty had been marred and mutilated by some hideous accident. Aunt Jane and Miss Argand were both born nurses—it is the birth-right of the best women—so that there was no occasion for the services of any of those estimable handmaids of healing who of late years have robbed sickness of half its terrors. In their gentle ministrations these two ladies found some solace for the grief that consumed them; but for Felix Argand there was no such mitigation. It was his fate to watch the sufferings of his darling—from whose neighbourhood he could not tear himself away—without being of the least assistance to her. It would be too severe upon him to quote his own self-reproach that he was as clumsy as a cart-horse; but he was certainly as nervous as a thoroughbred. The very type of thought, his mind, accustomed to unfettered freedom, was now compelled to revolve in a contracted circle, like a squirrel in its cage. He could think of nothing else save Lizzie, and of losing her. He passed a week of agony, which was repaid by

a single smile that she gave him as he sat beside her pillow. It was the first sign of consciousness she had exhibited, and the doctor drew the happiest auguries from it; as it turned out, however, very prematurely. The patient grew better, indeed, in many respects, and even stronger, but, there were certain symptoms which hinted of permanent mischief. She spoke little, and that in whispers, but a feverish anxiety seemed to consume her.

‘Is there anything that troubles you, dearest?’ inquired Felix; ‘anything on your mind?’

She did not answer, but her silence was no longer significant; a question had often to be put to her twice or thrice before she appeared to comprehend it.

‘Do you wish to see any one?’

‘Yes,’ she murmured, after a pause, ‘Sir David Dredge.’

The physician came; had a long interview with the patient, and afterwards with Mr. Argand. His face and manner were grave. There were peculiarities in the case that alarmed him, because he could not account for them; it was not egotism, but experience, that caused him, when he was puzzled, to fear the worst.

‘She is, at least, better than she was?’ urged Felix, pleading for a favourable verdict. ‘It is something, surely, that she has recovered consciousness?’

‘In most cases it would be so, no doubt; but not in hers. She has begun to think too soon; and yet to tell her not to do so is equivalent to telling an ordinary person not to breathe.’

‘You don’t mean to say that her mind is reverting to her work?’ said Felix, in alarm.

‘I am not sure. It would be as futile for it to do so, as regards the outcome, as though she were to attempt to construct a watch in her head; but I noticed when I spoke of absolute rest that she looked very troubled. Are you aware of there being any pressing need for her exerting herself; the conclusion of some book within a specified time, for instance?’

‘No; certainly not.’

‘Nevertheless, there is something on her mind. I hope there is—otherwise from what I have seen of her, the case is very grave.’

‘Do you apprehend——’ In vain Felix strove to put his question firmly.

‘No, not that,’ put in the physician, curtly. ‘Nothing immediate; nor, in my opinion, is she in what is commonly called danger. But for some people there are worse things than death.’

‘You fear for her mind,’ faltered Felix.

‘She fears for it herself—which is still more serious,’ answered the doctor. He walked to the window which looked upon the garden, where Aunt Jane was gathering a few late flowers for the sick-room.

‘Now, if Miss Dart were like that woman, she would be well in a fortnight,’ he said, with irritation; ‘but, being what she is——’ he stopped himself suddenly, remembering in whose presence he stood. It was not the fact that his companion was betrothed to his patient that stopped him; Sir David was not much troubled, in a general way, by sentiment, but Felix Argand was a very considerable personage in his way, whose feelings were worth consideration.

‘I suppose that all reference to her former pursuits, or to books at all, is to be avoided.’

‘Not at all; encourage her to talk as much as you can, no matter on what subjects. Let her do anything she has a mind for.’

‘But if she asks for pen and paper?’

‘She will not ask for them; she is only too conscious of her impotence; that, if I am not mistaken, is what is preying upon her. She says to herself, and it is only too probable that she is right, “My occupation is gone; I shall never write a line again.” Nevertheless, if she does ask for them, let her have them. She must be crossed in nothing.’

That very day, the sick girl whispered to Aunt Jane, ‘I want to write a letter.’ It seemed impossible that, in her condition, she should accomplish such a thing; nevertheless, the widow had her orders, and the writing materials were brought. She propped the patient up with pillows; and, with infinite labour, the task, which had once, alas! been so easy, was accomplished.

‘Post it with your own hands, Aunt Jane; and let no one know to whom it is sent,’ were the patient’s injunctions; after which, her overtaxed strength failed her, and she fainted away.

CHAPTER LI.

DISAPPOINTED HOPE.

THE news of Miss Dart's illness, following so quickly upon the revelation of her supposed identity, had produced no little sensation, just as one stone dropped into a pond immediately after another has a cumulative effect upon its surface. It had assisted many a diner-out in the performance of his duty to his neighbour; had formed the topic of conversation among the ladies in the drawing-room; and even evoked a languid comment in the smoking-room afterwards. Society had been pleased to consider itself quite distressed about it. Scores of carriages, some even with occupants, had called to leave 'kind inquiries' at her modest dwelling; and every post brought expressions of condolence and sympathy, many of them genuine, many more spurious, but all significant of the extent of her fame.

These letters, at Aunt Jane's request, were opened, and—when necessary—replied to, by Mr. Argand; communications of a private kind there were none, since her personal friends were aware of her condition, which, of course, made it impossible for her to attend to correspondence. On the morning after Sir David's visit, there arrived a letter, which her deputy opened as usual, and of the brief contents of which he became possessed almost before he was aware. Perhaps, even if he had guessed its private character, he would, under the circumstances, have been justified in reading it; at all events, as matters turned out, it was well indeed that he did so.

'Dear Miss Dart,' it began, 'I beg to acknowledge your favour of the 15th. Every word of it does you honour, except so far as it imputes a somewhat impatient, not to say greedy, disposition to your humble servant. Two thousand pounds is two thousand pounds, and I should, of course, be loth to lose it; but, in spite of your forebodings, I shall beg leave to continue to look upon it as in safe hands. At all events, for the present, there is not the slightest need to distress yourself about the matter. Three months hence, or even a later date, will be time enough to consider the subject from the point of view of your kind communication. Pray keep your mind at ease as far as I am concerned, and devote

yourself to regaining that health and strength to your recovery of which so many thousands are looking forward with selfish hopes, besides yours, most faithfully,

‘ALEXANDER ROSE.

In five minutes, Mr. Argand, with the letter in his pocket, was in a hansom on his way to Paternoster Row ; and that he had lost no time, nor stopped to speak of the matter to any one in the house, was fortunate ; for hardly had he left the house before Aunt Jane came down, at the patient's request, to know if there was any communication from Mr. Rose. He found the publisher at his office, and obtained from him, though not without much difficulty, the details of his transaction with Miss Dart. To do Mr. Rose justice, he was very unwilling to disclose his client's secret, even though it was to his obvious advantage to do so ; but to his visitor's authoritative statement—‘I am engaged to be married to this young lady ; her affairs are my affairs, and her debts are my debts’—there could, of course, be but one reply. Mr. Argand received it with an emotion that quite affected the kind-hearted publisher, and the sight of which would have facilitated subsequent arrangements more than he would have been willing to confess, even had there been any difficulty in the matter, which, indeed, there was none. Mr. Argand, on the security of the ‘Millennium, which thus proved itself almost as negotiable as current coin, became at once responsible for the sum advanced to Miss Dart ; and between them they concocted a letter which, placed in the same envelope, was simply substituted for that which had come from Paternoster Row by post.

‘Dear Miss Dart,—I beg to acknowledge (and here ended the publisher's part of the composition) your favour of the 15th inst. I am sorry you should have troubled yourself to write from your sick-room upon a mere business matter. When you get quite well and strong I shall be happy to discuss it with you ; but in the meantime, let me assure you that I have taken such measures as will amply insure myself against any possible loss as concerns the sum of money I advanced to you. I dare say this astonishes you, but there are a good many things in the book trade that would astonish you, if I were so imprudent as to reveal them. With the most sincere hope for your speedy recovery, ever yours faithfully,

‘ALEXANDER ROSE.’

The success of this little conspiracy was much more satisfactory than that which attends most pious frauds. Had Lizzie's brain been in full working order, it is doubtful, indeed, whether even the most positive assurance from a creditor could have convinced her that a debt could be discharged without any consideration having been given for it; but as matters were, no composing draught within the sources of the Pharmacopœia could have soothed the nerves as did Mr. Rose's quittance. From the moment she received it, she began to mend; and as time wore on, Felix supplemented the magic potion by giving her good accounts (quite justified by the facts, however) of the success of the 'Millennium.'

'If you should never write again, my darling,' he once said to her, 'there will always, thanks to you' (which was literally true, for but for her the 'Millennium' would have been his no longer), 'be amply sufficient for us to live upon.'

The way in which she received this news was corroboration enough, had he needed it, of the trouble that had so long consumed her.

'Thank Heaven for that!' she murmured, 'for Felix, darling, I *shall* never write again.'

Her mind, indeed, for all purposes of imagination had become a sealed book. She could think, but she could no longer create. What had caused this, science itself could not explain, though it was by no means the first case of a similar kind that had been presented to its notice. What was still more curious, now that the necessity for exertion in this direction no longer existed, the desire for it had also vanished. That passionate yearning to express her thoughts on paper which had once compelled her fingers seemed to have died a sudden death. She once asked Sir David, who continued to take great interest in her, on psychological as well as personal grounds, whether, in his opinion, it would ever be resuscitated. 'My dear young lady,' he answered, frankly, 'I don't think it ever will. It is possible, on the other hand, that it may be so. If anything should occur to stir your nature to its depths—some great happiness, for example (for we will not speak of calamity)—the magic fountain may leap up again with its accustomed song.' 'Then it will never do so,' she answered, with a smile and a sigh, 'since I am as happy already as it is possible for mortal woman to be;' for, as it happened, it was the eve of her bridal-day.

This resignation to the will of Fate was, of course, a

thankworthy circumstance; but though dreams of ambition no longer troubled Lizzie, those which she had so often indulged in, as regarded the happiness of others, were abandoned with supreme regret. She had secretly promised herself to make the welfare of Matthew and Mary her peculiar care. The former was recovering from his malady in a manner much beyond expectation; but, even if he grew strong and well, how could he ask his beloved Mary to become his wife without the means of supporting her? It was to be feared, indeed, that he had only been rescued from the grave to become, with his devoted mother, the prey of poverty. She had, as has been said, been living on her principal—a noble but most imprudent abnegation. She had said to herself, ‘It will last his time;’ and now, alas! without knowing it, the unfortunate young man was overliving that time, and his mother’s means were well-nigh exhausted. Their position was worse than precarious, for its end was certain—it was hopelessly deplorable. Lizzie could ‘rest on her laurels,’ and even live upon them; but they could not sustain others as she had hoped they would do.

This reflection embittered even her honeymoon, some of which was spent at Casterton. Had an opportunity offered itself to get rid of Battle Hill, she would have seized it, so urgent seemed the necessity of having a sum of money in hand to postpone, till Matthew should at least have made a complete recovery, the calamity that was overhanging him and his. Not a word, however, did the widow breathe of her need, the pressing character of which Lizzie only learnt through her original informant Roger Leyden. The bride and bridegroom were received with the same modest hospitality that had always reigned at the Look-out.

Mr. Snugg had good cause to congratulate his employer, though not himself, upon having got rid of all that well-known and valuable property commonly called ‘The Loomp,’ for there were no other bidders, and the time seemed distant indeed when the purchaser should put it to that use for which she had once so proudly intended it. The newly married couple had a fairly good, though of course precarious, income; for who can tell, in the case of however popular a periodical, what a few months may bring in the way of disaster? Their means had but a scanty margin. The Kilburn cottage was given up, and Aunt Jane came to live with them and Miss Argand in Harewood Square. In spite of much experience to the

contrary in similar arrangements, these elements kindly mixed; they were a united and happy family party. Miss Argand, though she tendered her resignation, and even pressed it, was not dispossessed of her position as the lady of the house. Domestic honours were not such as her new sister-in-law had ever sighed for, while it would have been as difficult to arouse Aunt Jane's ambition in that or any other direction as that of a white mouse.

In literature, as well as in other matters, Lizzie continued to take the same intelligent interest as before; it was but the creative faculty, which for the most part is only missed on paper, which had disappeared. Her sympathies were as keen as ever. She was even much agitated by an event that happened about this time, which might well have been supposed to have had little, if any, interest for her—namely, the decease of Jefferson Melburn. He met his death by violence at the hands of poachers with whom he and his keepers came into conflict in the coverts of Burrow Hall. The game laws was one of the many subjects which Miss Dart and he had been wont to discuss together, and she remembered well, how, for his own ends, as had so often happened, he had pretended to be a convert to her views. This, doubtless, made the manner of his death peculiarly distressing to her. Otherwise, that he had left the world could hardly be a matter to be deplored. He had done evil and not good all his days, and had left evil behind him. He had failed in an attempt to secure Winthrop's money (who had fallen a victim to his own vices some months before), had speculated on its reversion and contracted heavy debts, which had to be paid out of the already deeply encumbered estate; and the Squire was left with a mere pittance. It even became necessary to part with the hall, which was advertised for sale. There were memories about it connected with her mother which made this circumstance painful to Mary, though her father thought little of it. Broken in health and spirit, his pride was still stiff and strong, and in any case he would probably have shrunk from residing with narrow means in a spot where he had once held his head so high. He announced his intention of living abroad, nor did he express any wish that his daughter should accompany him. He had long, indeed, ceased to even affect an interest in her, and was her father only in name. How much circumstances had to do with this it was useless to speculate, but they certainly had

something. But for the need, or the apparent need, of a rich suitor for Mary, it is probable that this estrangement would never have taken place. How far our domestic relations are affected by external matters would be certainly a curious, and perhaps even a profitable, inquiry. Just now the hard results of poverty were pressing upon Lizzie's mind with painful persistence. She had known its harshness too well not to sympathise with its effect upon those she loved ; and she resented, upon their account, the palsy of those faculties which had once promised her such material advantages. If they had still been hers she could have relieved dear Mrs. Meyrick from her embarrassments—a term of euphony too often applied to ruin—and made two lives happy. For herself, she wanted nothing. Felix and she, though no longer bride and bridegroom, were still lovers. There was no happier home than hers in the whole world of London, nor did it contain a happier woman, save for the thought of those for whom the cup of Life held such different measure.

CHAPTER LII.

THE HEIR OF THE AGES.

THERE was once a woman who, if we may believe the records of the period in which she 'flourished,' was the prominent figure of the day in literary society in London. She was not only studied in the closet, but held the rapt attention of thousands upon the stage. We have the written authority of one of the greatest geniuses of all time that she was the greatest genius of *his* time, and his view was more or less endorsed by his contemporaries. While still in her prime, her gift—we may call it by what name we please, for, as often happens, the opinion of posterity and that of her own time were at variance on the matter—was suddenly taken away from her ; her popularity vanished with it so immediately that we may almost say she awoke one morning and found herself unknown. For a quarter of a century she lived on—a charming woman, mingling in society as before, and in one sense even more so than ever, for she was no longer on a pedestal but stood on the same plane with the rest of the world. It is recorded of her that, under these changed circumstances, she was very cheerful and happy. It had

been hitherto a case without parallel, but if matters should continue as at present, that of Elizabeth Argand bade fair to match it. She accepted her position with the like resignation; and if she did so now when the heavy hand of disappointment was first laid upon her, it was evident that with the lapse of time the weight of it would grow less and less. Indeed, what alone distressed her now—if anything of the kind could be said to distress her—were the thoughtless questions occasionally addressed to her, by those ignorant of the circumstances, with respect to her forthcoming works; a faint flush would then come into her cheeks, and she would make some evasive and generally gay reply. Such inquiries were natural enough, but they used to irritate Felix exceedingly.

‘Good Heavens! Sir,’ he exclaimed to one of those impertinent questioners, whose thoughtless words he imagined had given Lizzie more annoyance than was really the case, ‘are you in the habit of asking the matrons of your acquaintance when they are about to gratify the world with an increase to their families?’

But in his calmer moments he confessed to himself that this was not quite a parallel case.

One day in early spring-time, Lizzie received a letter from Casterton in an unfamiliar handwriting. She opened it in some alarm, for she was always on the watch for the first knell of a catastrophe in that quarter, nor did the signature of the letter, to which she turned at once, reassure her, for it was that of Roger Leyden, to whom alone beside herself the state of the widow’s affairs was known. The despatch was a long one, which increased her fears.

‘My dear Mrs. Argand,’ it began, ‘a most remarkable incident has just occurred here, the results of which almost take my breath away as I relate them. But a few hours ago, in the early morning, I chanced to be on Battle Hill—*your* Hill. There had been a heavy storm during the night, but the wind had ceased and the sky was clear. Suddenly I heard a rumbling noise like subterranean thunder. Then, as it seemed to me, the whole Hill, like the wood of Dunsinane, began to move. It was, however, only a part of it, and did not include the summit, on which I was standing. The fir-trees were tossed to and fro as though a strong wind were blowing, though they were not more agitated than I. I thought my beloved Hill, or half of it, was going to run into the sea. An

immense superficies, ten acres I should say, with all that was upon it was moving swiftly downwards, accompanied by a peculiar noise which I can only liken to that of a flock of sheep running in fright at the sight of a dog. You know there are a few firs in the extreme hollow, only the tips of which can be discerned from the top; I saw these disappearing with a sort of sudden but noiseless violence, as though they had been plucked up by the roots. Long and deep chasms gaped to left and right on which fragments of earth remained standing, still topped by the green turf. Hollows were raised to mounts and mounts reduced to hollows. Yet all this occurred in less, at utmost, than a quarter of an hour. Fortunately, as you will presently see, I was the sole witness of this phenomenon.

‘And now remains the most astounding incident of it. As soon as the movement of the earth permitted it, I descended to the scene of desolation. On the upper part of the lower formation of the hill—which, you remember, is like that of a quartern loaf—a body of earth about fifty feet thick had been carried away. On the bed of soil thus left bare, such a spectacle presented itself as had never been imagined out of an Eastern tale. The whole place was strewn with treasure. Diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and emeralds, all torn from their settings—showing they had been no personal ornaments—cups and flagons of gold, tarnished by time and mould, of course, but beautifully embossed and carved, strewn the ground in all directions. There were no less than five crucifixes of solid gold, and one crozier of the same metal, broken, but set with precious stones. I cannot at present compute even the number of these objects, and far less their value; but it must be something enormous. It is, of course, the hoard buried by Urfa the Dane—the spoil of the churches of London and Canterbury, of which defeat and death deprived him. He had placed it in the side of the hill next the sea, no doubt for the convenience of shipping it, and where, thank heaven! my lord never thought of digging for it.’

The reader here put down the letter in sheer amazement. Then a chill crept over her at the thought that what had just been described to her had not actually taken place. Perhaps the antiquary’s wits had failed him, and he had depicted as an actual occurrence what had, doubtless, presented itself to his imagination a hundred times before. There was, however, too much particularity in the narrative for that; and, moreover,

there was the landslip, which could hardly have suggested itself as a *Deus ex machina* unless it had proved to be one.

‘Notwithstanding the stupendousness of the phenomenon,’ continued her correspondent, ‘my first thought was of you and Mary. But for that, this sudden realisation of the dream of half a lifetime would, I verily believe, have shaken my reason. The question was how, having found this treasure, should the discovery of it be kept secret till it could be secured by its rightful owners? I had no spade or implements of any kind; and there was nothing for it but to take up the earth in my hands and therewith cover up the treasure which it had just revealed. As soon, however, as the news of the landslip should reach the town, the Hill, of course, would be visited by crowds, and this precaution would be unavailing. Fortunately, it was still early, and the noise of the late commotion had, as it turned out, reached no ears but my own. There was nothing for it but to hasten home and procure such bags and baskets as I could lay hands upon, and the services of a lad with a wheelbarrow. As I left the Hill, however, I met Harman, the miller, coming out of Casterton with his cart full of sacks. I knew him for a honest man, and at once determined to make him my confidant. Indeed, I could have done little without him, and might have lost all. I gave him to understand that what I wanted of him would be the best morning’s work miller ever put his hands to. And then, taking half-a-dozen sacks on our shoulders, I took him to the scene of operations. Never since Ali Baba beheld the treasure of the forty thieves was man so astonished. I told him that it all belonged to the Crown—a treasure-trove—and that every article was sacred, which, in a sense, was true. This seemed to impress him as much as the sight of the things themselves, and a great deal more than the landslip.

‘Besides his sack, he had some twine, and we packed up between us everything we could lay our hands upon, and took it in the cart to my cellar. Within an hour all Casterton was on the Loomp, examining the natural phenomenon; but the most remarkable of its incidents is for the present a secret, known only to your humble servant, Harman the miller, and one other. The one other is Mrs. Meyrick, to whom I could not resist the temptation of revealing it; not for the pleasure of telling, but because I knew the weight of care which the knowledge of Mary’s good fortune would remove. You and she (as per agreement) are, of course, the proprietors of all

this wealth, to dispose of as you please, after disbursing that "something handsome" which I have promised in your name to the miller. I have "consulted the books" as to your claim in the matter, and feel sure there is no doubt about it. I had, in my ignorance, secured you the manorial rights in the Hill—quite a titbit of legal literature, which you, nevertheless, had not the patience to listen to; but it seems I might have saved myself the trouble. The case stands thus: treasure-trove in most cases belongs to the Crown, which always pays an equivalent for its value upon the property being given up; in this case, however, there is no need to be under an obligation to Royalty, for when the said treasure-trove is not hidden and covered by the earth, it belongs to the finder, who, of course, is, by proxy, yourself. Heaven knows I never wanted a coin of it—and, indeed, there are no coins—there was no robbery on Urfa's part at all; it was pure sacrilege. I never had any wants, and I have no longer any wishes. Matthew and Mary, Mrs. Meyrick and your dear self, can now never know the curse of poverty; and you are all of that sort whom riches cannot spoil. It will suffice for me to be acknowledged a prophet in my own country. I would also respectfully draw your attention to the fact that the stars have fulfilled their prediction. When they decreed you wealth, I was very certain that they meant something more than the fruits of literature. They don't put themselves out (with portents and the like), as I told you, for a trifle. Matthew always called you the "Heir of the Ages"; but he little guessed how well the title was to be justified. It is now no longer a mere intellectual compliment. Centuries have given up their treasure to you, the Past has made you its residuary legatee. You will, however, I am well convinced, hold all in trust to promote the happiness and the good of others. I send you a thousand congratulations; and also, by train, lest you should fancy, as you well may, that I have been dreaming, a single sample of your new possessions, or, as Harman calls it, "one of the mugs"—a curious specimen of eighth-century handiwork.'

This letter had come by the afternoon post, so that Lizzie had not long to wait before communicating its contents to her husband. To him she felt they were first owed, since but for him she might never have become the possessor of Battle Hill. Second only to the pleasure she had of telling the good news to Felix was that she felt in revealing it to Aunt Jane.

Indeed, in the latter case, there were circumstances which made it even more delightful to her. It was, in fact, an act of reparation; for had she not once shown her the promised land (with a house on it) in vain, and unwittingly caused her a bitter disappointment? There had been a slip between the cup and the lip, but it had been made ample amends for by a slip of another kind. This was Joanna's first joke—'a beaded bubble winking at the brim' of her cup of happiness; and though her brother expressed an editorial hope that they might 'hear from her again,' it has been, up to the present date, her last. There was some contention about the division of the treasure—which realised quite a fortune—but it did not even attain the dimensions of a friendly suit, and was settled out of court. At first, Mary could not be brought to understand how any part of it came to her at all; but as Roger Leyden pointed out, with grave severity, if the agreement was void by which Lizzie became Mary's coheirress, it would deprive Lizzie of her own rights, since the treasure would then revert to the finder himself; and there would probably have been little difference in its distribution even if it had.

Indeed the greatest difficulty in the business was to get the antiquary to accept what seemed to all parties but himself a reasonable share. He was, however, eventually induced to take a sum which to him was affluence. If he did not hold his head higher in consequence he was, at least, brought nearer to his friends the stars, for, with a portion of the money, he built an enormous telescope, which was the wonder of the neighbourhood.

None but himself knew how near the little household at the Look-out had been to ruin when fortune thus stepped in and saved it. But the change could be read in the widow's face. It was marvellous, to those who knew nothing of the care that had oppressed her, how she suddenly threw off the 'fardel of her years,' and became comparatively young again. Within the period which Sir David had allowed for his recovery, her Matthew had completely regained health and strength. His favourite walk during convalescence was to 'The Loomp,' where, on the very spot where the treasure was found, a house was rising, under the superintendence of Mr. Snugg, for Lizzie and her husband, with special rooms in it, may be sure, for Joanna and Aunt Jane.

The first use to which it was put when completed was to

welcome the wedding guests of the young couple. That Mary should be married from her house was a pleasure that Lizzie had long promised herself, and, unlike most pleasures, it fulfilled all expectation. The guests were few, but never did happier faces beam round a breakfast-table. Even the Squire, who had come over from the Continent to do honour to the occasion, was wreathed in smiles. Mary had behaved to him with great generosity, and even offered to make such an arrangement as would enable him to reside at Burrow Hall, which had not as yet been sold. He preferred, however, the life which he had chosen for himself, and which suited him in many ways. The family seat was therefore purchased by the young couple, who divide the time between it and the Look-out. To borrow a phrase from the Major's sporting vocabulary, you could—in summer at least—cover the whole of the chief personages of this history with a pocket-handkerchief, for they dwell only a few miles apart, even when they are not, as often happens, staying under each other's roofs.

Matthew and Mary have several children, all idolised by grandmamma; but fortune has denied that blessing to the Argands. They are, nevertheless, a very happy couple. Half the year they spend in Casterton and half in Harewood Square. The "Millennium" still lives and prospers under Mr. Argand's management. What does Lizzie do with herself? it may be asked. It is not, however, necessary to answer that question, since the reader, if he is a reader, knows as much about the matter as I do. On the very afternoon of Mary's marriage Felix found his wife at her desk in her boudoir, the window of which commands, to my mind, the most charming view in England. 'That seems a very lengthy communication, my dear,' he observed: 'are you writing an account of our festivities to the *Morning Post*?'

'No, my dear; I am clothing the skeleton.'

Sir David's forecast had been correct. Mary's marriage with Matthew had stirred Lizzie's nature to its very depths, and the spring, so long sealed, had burst forth again.

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